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Large-Paper Edition

THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS

OF

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

IN TEN VOLUMES

VOLUME III















THE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF WESTMORELAND

*A Mountain Road, Westmoreland*





THE  
COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS  
OF  
*William Wordsworth*

III  
THE PRELUDE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
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## NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

### A MOUNTAIN ROAD, WESTMORELAND . . . *Frontispiece*

. . . "And when the spring  
Looks out, and all the pastures dance with lambs,  
And when the flock with warmer weather, climbs  
High and higher, him his office leads  
To watch their goings, whatsoever track  
The wanderers choose." (Page 191)

In the springtime, when the lambs are able to  
walk, the shepherd drives the flock to the fields,  
and there they stay until the winter.

### WORDSWORTH'S BIRTHPLACE AT COCKERMOUTH PAGE 16

"Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:  
Much favoured in my birthplace."

### ESTHWAITE WATER . . . . . 116

. . . "Oft in the public roads  
Yet unfrequented, while the morning light  
Was yellowing the hill-tops, I went abroad  
With a dear friend, and for the better part  
Of two delightful hours we strolled along  
By the still borders of the misty lake  
Repeating favourite verses with one voice."

The poet spent many happy hours of his boyhood here. The hill in the background is Weather-lamb, referred to in "The Prelude" on page 19.

## NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

### THE SHEPHERD . . . . . 186

“That noticeable kindness of heart  
Sprang out of fountains, there abounding most,  
Where sovereign Nature dictated the tasks  
And occupations with her beauty adorned,  
And Shepherds were the men that pleased me first.”

### DOROTHY WORDSWORTH . . . . . 316

*(From an oil painting by Crowbent in 1833).*

“Child of my parents! Sister of my soul!”

The lifelong companion of the poet, of whom Coleridge wrote: “W. and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed! in mind and heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her rather ordinary; and if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty! but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion her most innocent soul outbeams so brightly that who saw her would say: —

‘Guilt was a thing impossible to her.’

Her information various. Her eye watchful in minutest observation of Nature; and her taste a perfect electrometer.”

# THE PRELUDE

OR

GROWTH OF A POET'S MIND

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM



# THE PRELUDE; OR, GROWTH OF A POET'S MIND

## AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM

1799-1805 1850

### ADVERTISEMENT

The following Poem was commenced in the beginning of the year 1799, and completed in the summer of 1805.

The design and occasion of the work are described by the Author in his Preface to the "Excursion," first published in 1814, where he thus speaks: —

"Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such an employment.

"As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them.

"That work, addressed to a dear friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it, was a determination to compose a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society, and to be entitled the 'Recluse'; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement.

"The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the



## THE PRELUDE

history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor pieces, which have been long before the public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive reader to have such connection with the main work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices."

Such was the Author's language in the year 1814.

It will thence be seen, that the present Poem was intended to be introductory to the "Recluse," and that the "Recluse," if completed, would have consisted of Three Parts. Of these, the Second Part alone: viz. the "Excursion," was finished, and given to the world by the Author.

The First Book of the First Part of the "Recluse" still remains in manuscript; but the Third Part was only planned. The materials of which it would have been formed have, however, been incorporated, for the most part, in the Author's other Publications, written subsequently to the "Excursion."

The Friend, to whom the present Poem is addressed, was the late SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, who was resident in Malta, for the restoration of his health, when the greater part of it was composed.

Mr. Coleridge read a considerable portion of the Poem while he was abroad; and his feelings, on hearing it recited by the Author (after his return to his own country), are recorded in his Verses, addressed to Mr. Wordsworth, which will be found in the *Sibylline Leaves*, p. 197, ed. 1817, or *Poetical Works*, by S. T. Coleridge, vol. i, p. 206.

RYDAL MOUNT, *July 13th*, 1850.

# CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

## BOOK FIRST

### INTRODUCTION — CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

OH there is blessing in this gentle breeze,  
A visitant that while it fans my cheek  
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings  
From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.  
Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come  
To none more grateful than to me; escaped  
From the vast city, where I long had pined  
A discontented sojourner: now free,  
Free as a bird to settle where I will.  
What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale  
Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove  
Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream  
Shall with its murmur lull me into rest?  
The earth is all before me. With a heart  
Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,  
I look about; and should the chosen guide  
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,  
I cannot miss my way. I breathe again!  
Trances of thought and mountings of the mind  
Come fast upon me: it is shaken off,  
That burthen of my own unnatural self,  
The heavy weight of many a weary day  
Not mine, and such as were not made for me.

## THE PRELUDE

Long months of peace (if such bold word accord  
With any promises of human life),  
Long months of ease and undisturbed delight  
Are mine in prospect; whither shall I turn,  
By road or pathway, or through trackless field,  
Up hill or down, or shall some floating thing  
Upon the river point me out my course?

Dear Liberty! Yet what would it avail  
But for a gift that consecrates the joy?  
For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven  
Was blowing on my body, felt within  
A correspondent breeze, that gently moved  
With quickening virtue, but is now become  
A tempest, a redundant energy,  
Vexing its own creation. Thanks to both,  
And their congenial powers, that, while they join  
In breaking up a long-continued frost,  
Bring with them vernal promises, the hope  
Of active days urged on by flying hours, —  
Days of sweet leisure, taxed with patient thought  
Abstruse, nor wanting punctual service high,  
Matins and vespers of harmonious verse!

Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make  
A present joy the matter of a song,

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains  
That would not be forgotten, and are here  
Recorded: to the open fields I told  
A prophecy: poetic numbers came  
Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe  
A renovated spirit singled out,  
Such hope was mine, for holy services.  
My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind's  
Internal echo of the imperfect sound;  
To both I listened, drawing from them both  
A cheerful confidence in things to come.

Content and not unwilling now to give  
A respite to this passion, I paced on  
With brisk and eager steps; and came, at length,  
To a green shady place, where down I sate  
Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice  
And settling into gentler happiness.  
'T was autumn, and a clear and placid day,  
With warmth, as much as needed, from a sun  
Two hours declinèd towards the west; a day  
With silver clouds, and sunshine on the grass,  
And in the sheltered and the sheltering grove  
A perfect stillness. Many were the thoughts  
Encouraged and dismissed, till choice was made  
Of a known Vale, whither my feet should turn,

## THE PRELUDE

Nor rest till they had reached the very door  
Of the one cottage which methought I saw.  
No picture of mere memory ever looked  
So fair; and while upon the fancied scene  
I gazed with growing love, a higher power  
Than Fancy gave assurance of some work  
Of glory there forthwith to be begun,  
Perhaps too there performed. Thus long I mused,  
Nor e'er lost sight of what I mused upon,  
Save when, amid the stately grove of oaks,  
Now here, now there, an acorn, from its cup  
Dislodged, through sere leaves rustled, or at once  
To the bare earth dropped with a startling sound.  
From that soft couch I rose not, till the sun  
Had almost touched the horizon; casting then  
A backward glance upon the curling cloud  
Of city smoke, by distance ruralised;  
Keen as a Truant or a Fugitive,  
But as a Pilgrim resolute, I took,  
Even with the chance equipment of that hour,  
The road that pointed toward the chosen Vale.  
It was a splendid evening, and my soul  
Once more made trial of her strength, nor lacked  
Æolian visitations; but the harp  
Was soon defrauded, and the banded host  
Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds,



## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

And lastly utter silence! "Be it so;  
Why think of anything but present good?"  
So, like a home-bound labourer, I pursued  
My way beneath the mellowing sun, that shed  
Mild influence; nor left in me one wish  
Again to bend the Sabbath of that time  
To a servile yoke. What need of many words?  
A pleasant loitering journey, through three days  
Continued, brought me to my hermitage.  
I spare to tell of what ensued, the life  
In common things — the endless store of things,  
Rare, or at least so seeming, every day  
Found all about me in one neighbourhood —  
The self-congratulation, and, from morn  
To night, in broken cheerfulness serene.  
But speedily an earnest longing rose  
To brace myself to some determined aim,  
Reading or thinking; either to lay up  
New stores, or rescue from decay the old  
By timely interference: and therewith  
Came hopes still higher, that with outward life  
I might endue some airy phantasies  
That had been floating loose about for years,  
And to such beings temperately deal forth  
The many feelings that oppressed my heart.  
That hope hath been discouraged; welcome light



## THE PRELUDE

Dawns from the east, but dawns to disappear  
And mock me with a sky that ripens not  
Into a steady morning: if my mind,  
Remembering the bold promise of the past,  
Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,  
Vain is her wish; where'er she turns she finds  
Impediments from day to day renewed.

And now it would content me to yield up  
Those lofty hopes awhile, for present gifts  
Of humbler industry. But, oh, dear Friend!  
The Poet, gentle creature as he is,  
Hath, like the Lover, his unruly times;  
His fits when he is neither sick nor well,  
Though no distress be near him but his own  
Unmanageable thoughts: his mind, best pleased  
While she as duteous as the mother dove  
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,  
But like the innocent bird, hath goadings on  
That drive her as in trouble through the groves;  
With me is now such passion, to be blamed  
No otherwise than as it lasts too long.

When, as becomes a man who would prepare  
For such an arduous work, I through myself  
Make rigorous inquisition, the report

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Is often cheering; for I neither seem  
To lack that first great gift, the vital soul,  
Nor general Truths, which are themselves a sort  
Of Elements and Agents, Under-powers,  
Subordinate helpers of the living mind:  
Nor am I naked of external things,  
Forms, images, nor numerous other aids  
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil  
And needful to build up a Poet's praise.  
Time, place, and manner do I seek, and these  
Are found in plenteous store, but nowhere such  
As may be singled out with steady choice;  
No little band of yet remembered names  
Whom I, in perfect confidence, might hope  
To summon back from lonesome banishment,  
And make them dwellers in the hearts of men  
Now living, or to live in future years.  
Sometimes the ambitious Power of choice, mistaking  
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,  
Will settle on some British theme, some old  
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;  
More often turning to some gentle place  
Within the groves of Chivalry, I pipe  
To shepherd swains, or seated harp in hand,  
Amid reposing knights by a river side  
Or fountain, listen to the grave reports

## THE PRELUDE

Of dire enchantments faced and overcome  
By the strong mind, and tales of warlike feats,  
Where spear encountered spear, and sword with  
sword  
Fought, as if conscious of the blazonry  
That the shield bore, so glorious was the strife;  
Whence inspiration for a song that winds  
Through ever-changing scenes of votive quest  
Wrongs to redress, harmonious tribute paid  
To patient courage and unblemished truth,  
To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable,  
And Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves.  
Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would relate  
How vanquished Mithridates northward passed,  
And, hidden in the cloud of years, became  
Odin, the Father of a race by whom  
Perished the Roman Empire: how the friends  
And followers of Sertorius, out of Spain  
Flying, found shelter in the Fortunate Isles,  
And left their usages, their arts and laws,  
To disappear by a slow gradual death,  
To dwindle and to perish one by one,  
Starved in those narrow bounds: but not the soul  
Of Liberty, which fifteen hundred years  
Survived, and, when the European came  
With skill and power that might not be withstood,

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Did, like a pestilence, maintain its hold  
And wasted down by glorious death that race  
Of natural heroes: or I would record  
How, in tyrannic times, some high-souled man,  
Unnamed among the chronicles of kings,  
Suffered in silence for Truth's sake: or tell,  
How that one Frenchman,<sup>1</sup> through continued force  
Of meditation on the inhuman deeds  
Of those who conquered first the Indian Isles,  
Went single in his ministry across  
The Ocean; not to comfort the oppressed,  
But, like a thirsty wind, to roam about  
Withering the Oppressor: how Gustavus sought  
Help at his need in Dalecarlia's mines:  
How Wallace fought for Scotland; left the name  
Of Wallace to be found, like a wild flower,  
All over his dear Country; left the deeds  
Of Wallace, like a family of Ghosts,  
To people the steep rocks and river banks,  
Her natural sanctuaries, with a local soul  
Of independence and stern liberty.  
Sometimes it suits me better to invent  
A tale from my own heart, more near akin  
To my own passions and habitual thoughts;  
Some variegated story, in the main  
Lofty, but the unsubstantial structure melts

## THE PRELUDE

Before the very sun that brightens it,  
Mist into air dissolving! Then a wish,  
My last and favourite aspiration, mounts  
With yearning toward some philosophic song  
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life;  
With meditations passionate from deep  
Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse  
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre;  
But from this awful burthen I full soon  
Take refuge and beguile myself with trust  
That mellow years will bring a riper mind  
And clearer insight. Thus my days are past  
In contradiction; with no skill to part  
Vague longing, haply bred by want of power,  
From paramount impulse not to be withstood,  
A timorous capacity, from prudence,  
From circumspection, infinite delay.  
Humility and modest awe, themselves  
Betray me, serving often for a cloak  
To a more subtle selfishness; that now  
Locks every function up in blank reserve,  
Now dupes me, trusting to an anxious eye  
That with intrusive restlessness beats off  
Simplicity and self-presented truth.  
Ah! better far than this, to stray about  
Voluptuously through fields and rural walks,

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

And ask no record of the hours, resigned  
To vacant musing, unproved neglect  
Of all things, and deliberate holiday.  
Far better never to have heard the name  
Of zeal and just ambition, than to live  
Baffled and plagued by a mind that every hour  
Turns recreant to her task; takes heart again,  
Then feels immediately some hollow thought  
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.  
This is my lot; for either still I find  
Some imperfection in the chosen theme,  
Or see of absolute accomplishment  
Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself,  
That I recoil and droop, and seek repose  
In listlessness from vain perplexity,  
Unprofitably travelling toward the grave,  
Like a false steward who hath much received  
And renders nothing back.

Was it for this  
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved  
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,  
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,  
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice  
That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst  
thou,

O Derwent! winding among grassy holms



## THE PRELUDE

Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,  
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts  
To more than infant softness, giving me  
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind  
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm  
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.

When he had left the mountains and received  
On his smooth breast the shadow of those towers  
That yet survive, a shattered monument  
Of feudal sway, the bright blue river passed  
Along the margin of our terrace walk;  
A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved.  
Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child,  
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,  
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;  
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again  
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured  
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves  
Of yellow ragwort; or, when rock and hill,  
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,  
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone  
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born  
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut  
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport  
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.



*Wordsworth's Birthplace at Cockermouth*







## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:  
Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less  
In that beloved Vale to which erelong  
We were transplanted; — there were we let loose  
For sports of wider range. Ere I had told  
Ten birth-days, when among the mountain slopes  
Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped  
The last autumnal crocus, 't was my joy  
With store of springes o'er my shoulder hung  
To range the open heights where woodcocks run  
Along the smooth green turf. Through half the  
night,

Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied  
That anxious visitation; — moon and stars  
Were shining o'er my head. I was alone,  
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace  
That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell  
In these night wanderings, that a strong desire  
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird  
Which was the captive of another's toil  
Became my prey; and when the deed was done  
I heard among the solitary hills  
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

## THE PRELUDE

Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,  
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird  
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean  
Our object and inglorious, yet the end  
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung  
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass  
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock  
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)  
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,  
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time  
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,  
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind  
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky  
Of earth — and with what motion moved the clouds!

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society. How strange, that all  
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,  
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused  
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,  
And that a needful part, in making up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!



## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to  
employ;  
Whether her fearless visitings, or those  
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light  
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she would use  
Severer interventions, ministry  
More palpable, as best might suit her aim.

One summer evening (led by her) I found  
A little boat tied to a willow tree  
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.  
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in  
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth  
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice  
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;  
Leaving behind her still, on either side,  
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,  
Until they melted all into one track  
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,  
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point  
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view  
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,  
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above  
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.  
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily  
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,



## THE PRELUDE

And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
Went heaving through the water like a swan;  
When, from behind that craggy steep till then  
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,  
As if with voluntary power instinct,  
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,  
And growing still in stature the grim shape  
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,  
And through the silent water stole my way  
Back to the covert of the willow tree;  
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, —  
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave  
And serious mood; but after I had seen  
That spectacle, for many days, my brain  
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts  
There hung a darkness, call it solitude  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
Of sea, or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe! <sup>2</sup>,  
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought  
That givest to forms and images a breath  
And everlasting motion, not in vain  
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn  
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
The passions that build up our human soul;  
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,  
But with high objects, with enduring things —  
With life and Nature — purifying thus  
The elements of feeling and of thought,  
And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
Both pain and fear, until we recognise  
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.  
Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me  
With stinted kindness. In November days,  
When vapours rolling down the valley made  
A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods,  
At noon and 'mid the calm of summer nights,  
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,  
Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went  
In solitude, such intercourse was mine;  
Mine was it in the fields both day and night,  
And by the waters, all the summer long.

And in the frosty season, when the sun

## THE PRELUDE

Was set, and visible for many a mile  
The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,  
I heeded not their summons: happy time  
It was indeed for all of us — for me  
It was a time of rapture! Clear and loud  
The village clock tolled six, — I wheeled about,  
Proud and exulting like an untired horse  
That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,  
We hissed along the polished ice in games  
Confederate, imitative of the chase  
And woodland pleasures, — the resounding horn,  
The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.  
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,  
And not a voice was idle; with the din  
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;  
The leafless trees and every icy crag  
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills  
Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars  
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west  
The orange sky of evening died away.  
Not seldom from the uproar I retired  
Into a silent bay, or sportively  
Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,  
To cut across the reflex of a star  
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,  
When we had given our bodies to the wind,  
And all the shadowy banks on either side  
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still  
The rapid line of motion, then at once  
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,  
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs  
Wheeled by me — even as if the earth had rolled  
With visible motion her diurnal round!  
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,  
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched  
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky  
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!  
And Souls of lonely places! can I think  
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed  
Such ministry, when ye, through many a year  
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,  
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,  
Impressed, upon all forms, the characters  
Of danger or desire; and thus did make  
The surface of the universal earth,  
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,  
Work like a sea ?  
Not uselessly employed,  
Might I pursue this theme through every change

## THE PRELUDE

Of exercise and play, to which the year  
Did summon us in his delightful round.

We were a noisy crew; the sun in heaven  
Beheld not vales more beautiful than ours;  
Nor saw a band in happiness and joy  
Richer, or worthier of the ground they trod.  
I could record with no reluctant voice  
The woods of autumn, and their hazel bowers  
With milk-white clusters hung; the rod and line,  
True symbol of hope's foolishness, whose strong  
And unproved enchantment led us on  
By rocks and pools shut out from every star,  
All the green summer, to forlorn cascades  
Among the windings hid of mountain brooks.  
— Unfading recollections! at this hour  
The heart is almost mine with which I felt,  
From some hill-top on sunny afternoons,  
The paper kite high among fleecy clouds  
Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser;  
Or, from the meadows sent on gusty days,  
Beheld her breast the wind, then suddenly  
Dashed headlong, and rejected by the storm.

Ye lowly cottages wherein we dwelt,  
A ministration of your own was yours;

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Can I forget you, being as you were  
So beautiful among the pleasant fields  
In which ye stood? or can I here forget  
The plain and seemly countenance with which  
Ye dealt out your plain comforts? Yet had ye  
Delights and exultations of your own.  
Eager and never weary we pursued  
Our home-amusements by the warm peat-fire  
At evening, when with pencil, and smooth slate  
In square divisions parcelled out and all  
With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o'er  
We schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head  
In strife too humble to be named in verse:  
Or round the naked table, snow-white deal,  
Cherry or maple, sate in close array,  
And to the combat, Loo or Whist, led on  
A thick-ribbed army; not, as in the world,  
Neglected and ungratefully thrown by  
Even for the very service they had wrought,  
But husbanded through many a long campaign.  
Uncouth assemblage was it, where no few  
Had changed their functions: some, plebeian cards  
Which Fate, beyond the promise of their birth,  
Had dignified, and called to represent  
The persons of departed potentates.  
Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell!



## THE PRELUDE

Ironie diamonds, — clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades,  
A congregation piteously akin!  
Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit,  
Those sooty knaves, precipitated down  
With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven:  
The paramount ace, a moon in her eclipse,  
Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay,  
And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained  
By royal visages. Meanwhile abroad  
Incessant rain was falling, or the frost  
Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth;  
And, interrupting oft that eager game,  
From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice  
The pent-up air, struggling to free itself,  
Gave out to meadow grounds and hills a loud  
Protracted yelling, like the noise of wolves  
Howling in troops along the Bothnic Main.

Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace  
How Nature by extrinsic passion first  
Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair,  
And made me love them, may I here omit  
How other pleasures have been mine, and joys  
Of subtler origin; how I have felt,  
Not seldom even in that tempestuous time,  
Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense



## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Which seem, in their simplicity, to own  
An intellectual charm; that calm delight  
Which, if I err not, surely must belong  
To those first-born affinities that fit  
Our new existence to existing things,  
And, in our dawn of being, constitute  
The bond of union between life and joy.

Yes, I remember when the changeful earth,  
And twice five summers on my mind had stamped  
The faces of the moving year, even then  
I held unconscious intercourse with beauty  
Old as creation, drinking in a pure  
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths  
Of curling mist, or from the level plain  
Of waters coloured by impending clouds.

The sands of Westmoreland, the creeks and bays  
Of Cumbria's rocky limits, they can tell  
How, when the Sea threw off his evening shade,  
And to the shepherd's hut on distant hills  
Sent welcome notice of the rising moon,  
How I have stood, to fancies such as these  
A stranger, linking with the spectacle  
No conscious memory of a kindred sight,  
And bringing with me no peculiar sense  
Of quietness or peace; yet have I stood,

## THE PRELUDE

Even while mine eye hath moved o'er many a league  
Of shining water, gathering as it seemed,  
Through every hair-breadth in that field of light,  
New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.

Thus oft amid those fits of vulgar joy  
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits  
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss  
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood  
And is forgotten; even then I felt  
Gleams like the flashing of a shield; — the earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things; sometimes, 't is true,  
By chance collisions and quaint accidents  
(Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed  
Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.  
— And if the vulgar joy by its own weight  
Wearied itself out of the memory,  
The scenes which were a witness of that joy  
Remained in their substantial lineaments  
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-TIME

Were visible, a daily sight; and thus  
By the impressive discipline of fear,  
By pleasure and repeated happiness,  
So frequently repeated, and by force  
Of obscure feelings representative  
Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,  
So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,  
Though yet the day was distant, did become  
Habitually dear, and all their forms  
And changeful colours by invisible links  
Were fastened to the affections.

I began

My story early — not misled, I trust,  
By an infirmity of love for days  
Disowned by memory — ere the breath of spring  
Planting my snowdrops among winter snows:  
Nor will it seem to thee, O Friend! so prompt  
In sympathy, that I have lengthened out  
With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale.  
Meanwhile, my hope has been, that I might fetch  
Invigorating thoughts from former years;  
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,  
And haply meet reproaches too, whose power  
May spur me on, in manhood now mature  
To honourable toil. Yet should these hopes  
Prove vain, and thus should neither I be taught

## THE PRELUDE

To understand myself, nor thou to know  
With better knowledge how the heart was framed  
Of him thou lovest; need I dread from thee  
Harsh judgments, if the song be loth to quit  
Those recollected hours that have the charm  
Of visionary things, those lovely forms  
And sweet sensations that throw back our life,  
And almost make remotest infancy  
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining?

One end at least hath been attained; my mind  
Hath been revived, and if this genial mood  
Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down  
Through later years the story of my life.  
The road lies plain before me; —'t is a theme  
Single and of determined bounds; and hence  
I choose it rather at this time, than work  
Of ampler or more varied argument,  
Where I might be discomfited and lost:  
And certain hopes are with me, that to thee  
This labour will be welcome, honoured Friend!

# SCHOOL-TIME

## BOOK SECOND

### SCHOOL-TIME (*continued*)

THUS far, O Friend! have we, though leaving much  
Unvisited, endeavoured to retrace  
The simple ways in which my childhood walked;  
Those chiefly that first led me to the love  
Of rivers, woods, and fields. The passion yet  
Was in its birth, sustained as might befall  
By nourishment that came unsought; for still  
From week to week, from month to month, we  
lived

A round of tumult. Duly were our games  
Prolonged in summer till the daylight failed;  
No chair remained before the doors; the bench  
And threshold steps were empty; fast asleep  
The labourer, and the old man who had sate  
A later lingerer; yet the revelry  
Continued and the loud uproar: at last,  
When all the ground was dark, and twinkling stars  
Edged the black clouds, home and to bed we went,  
Feverish, with weary joints and beating minds.  
Ah! is there one who ever has been young,  
Nor needs a warning voice to tame the pride  
Of intellect and virtue's self-esteem?  
One is there, though the wisest and the best

## THE PRELUDE

Of all mankind, who covets not at times  
Union that cannot be; — who would not give  
If so he might, to duty and to truth  
The eagerness of infantine desire?  
A tranquillising spirit presses now  
On my corporeal frame, so wide appears  
The vacancy between me and those days  
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,  
That, musing on them, often do I seem  
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
And of some other Being. A rude mass  
Of native rock, left midway in the square  
Of our small market village, was the goal  
Or centre of these sports; and when, returned  
After long absence, thither I repaired,  
Gone was the old grey stone, and in its place  
A smart Assembly-room usurped the ground  
That had been ours. There let the fiddle scream,  
And be ye happy! Yet, my Friends! I know  
That more than one of you will think with me  
Of those soft starry nights, and that old Dame  
From whom the stone was named, who there  
                  had sate,  
And watched her table with its huckster's wares  
Assiduous, through the length of sixty years.



## SCHOOL-TIME

We ran a boisterous course; the year span round  
With giddy motion. But the time approached  
That brought with it a regular desire  
For calmer pleasures, when the winning forms  
Of Nature were collaterally attached  
To every scheme of holiday delight  
And every boyish sport, less grateful else  
And languidly pursued.

When summer came,  
Our pastime was, on bright half-holidays,  
To sweep along the plain of Windermere  
With rival oars; and the selected bourne  
Was now an Island musical with birds  
That sang and ceased not; now a Sister Isle  
Beneath the oaks' umbrageous covert, sown  
With lilies of the valley like a field;  
And now a third small Island, where survived  
In solitude the ruins of a shrine  
Once to Our Lady dedicate, and served  
Daily with chaunted rites. In such a race  
So ended, disappointment could be none,  
Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy:  
We rested in the shade, all pleased alike,  
Conquered and conqueror. Thus the pride of strength,  
And the vain-glory of superior skill,  
Were tempered; thus was gradually produced

## THE PRELUDE

A quiet independence of the heart:  
And to my Friend who knows me I may add,  
Fearless of blame, that hence for future days  
Ensued a diffidence and modesty,  
And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,  
The self-sufficing power of Solitude.

Our daily meals were frugal, Sabine fare!  
More than we wished we knew the blessing then  
Of vigorous hunger — hence corporeal strength  
Unsapped by delicate viands; for, exclude  
A little weekly stipend, and we lived  
Through three divisions of the quartered year  
In penniless poverty. But now to school  
From the half-yearly holidays returned,  
We came with weightier purses, that sufficed  
To furnish treats more costly than the Dame  
Of the old grey stone, from her scant board, supplied.  
Hence rustic dinners on the cool green ground,  
Or in the woods, or by a river side  
Or shady fountains, while among the leaves  
Soft airs were stirring, and the mid-day sun  
Unfelt shone brightly round us in our joy.  
Nor is my aim neglected if I tell  
How sometimes, in the length of those half-years,  
We from our funds drew largely; — proud to curb,

## SCHOOL-TIME

And eager to spur on, the galloping steed;  
And with the courteous inn-keeper, whose stud  
Supplied our want, we haply might employ  
Sly subterfuge, if the adventure's bound  
Were distant: some famed temple where of yore  
The Druids worshipped, or the antique walls  
Of that large abbey, where within the Vale  
Of Nightshade, to St. Mary's honour built,  
Stands yet a mouldering pile with fractured arch,  
Belfry, and images, and living trees;  
A holy scene! — Along the smooth green turf  
Our horses grazed. To more than inland peace,  
Left by the west wind sweeping overhead  
From a tumultuous ocean, trees and towers  
In that sequestered valley may be seen,  
Both silent and both motionless alike;  
Such the deep shelter that is there, and such  
The safeguard for repose and quietness.

Our steeds remounted and the summons given,  
With whip and spur we through the chauntry flew  
In uncouth race, and left the cross-legged knight,  
And the stone-abbot, and that single wren  
Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave  
Of the old church, that — though from recent showers  
The earth was comfortless, and, touched by faint

## THE PRELUDE

Internal breezes, sobbings of the place  
And respirations, from the roofless walls  
The shuddering ivy dripped large drops — yet still  
So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible bird  
Sang to herself, that there I could have made  
My dwelling-place, and lived for ever there  
To hear such music. Through the walls we flew  
And down the valley, and, a circuit made  
In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth  
We scampered homewards. Oh, ye rocks and streams,  
And that still spirit shed from evening air!  
Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt  
Your presence, when with slackened step we breathed  
Along the sides of the steep hills, or when  
Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea  
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

Midway on long Winander's eastern shore,  
Within the crescent of a pleasant bay,  
A tavern stood; no homely-featured house,  
Primeval like its neighbouring cottages,  
But 't was a splendid place, the door beset  
With chaises, grooms, and liveries, and within  
Decanters, glasses, and the blood-red wine.  
In ancient times, and ere the Hall was built  
On the large island, had this dwelling been

## SCHOOL-TIME

More worthy of a poet's love, a hut,  
Proud of its own bright fire and sycamore shade.  
But — though the rhymes were gone that once  
    inscribed

The threshold, and large golden characters,  
Spread o'er the spangled sign-board, had dislodged  
The old Lion and usurped his place, in slight  
And mockery of the rustic painter's hand —  
Yet, to this hour, the spot to me is dear  
With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay  
Upon a slope surmounted by a plain  
Of a small bowling-green; beneath us stood  
A grove, with gleams of water through the trees  
And over the tree-tops; nor did we want  
Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.  
There, while through half an afternoon we played  
On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed  
Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee  
Made all the mountains ring. But, ere night-fall,  
When in our pinnace we returned at leisure  
Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach  
Of some small island steered our course with one,  
The Minstrel of the Troop, and left him there,  
And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute  
Alone upon the rock — oh, then, the calm  
And dead still water lay upon my mind

## THE PRELUDE

Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,  
Never before so beautiful, sank down  
Into my heart, and held me like a dream!  
Thus were my sympathies enlarged, and thus  
Daily the common range of visible things  
Grew dear to me: already I began  
To love the sun; a boy I loved the sun,  
Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge  
And surety of our earthly life, a light  
Which we behold and feel we are alive;  
Nor for his bounty to so many worlds —  
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay  
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen  
The western mountain touch his setting orb,  
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess  
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow  
For its own pleasure and I breathed with joy.  
And, from like feelings, humble though intense,  
To patriotic and domestic love  
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;  
For I could dream away my purposes,  
Standing to gaze upon her while she hung  
Midway between the hills as if she knew  
No other region, but belonged to thee,  
Yea, appertained by a peculiar right  
To thee and thy grey huts, thou one dear Vale!



## SCHOOL-TIME

Those incidental charms which first attached  
My heart to rural objects, day by day  
Grew weaker, and I hasten on to tell  
How Nature, intervenient till this time  
And secondary, now at length was sought  
For her own sake. But who shall parcel out  
His intellect by geometric rules,  
Split like a province into round and square?  
Who knows the individual hour in which  
His habits were first sown, even as a seed?  
Who that shall point as with a wand and say  
“This portion of the river of my mind  
Came from yon fountain?” Thou, my Friend! art one  
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee  
Science appears but what in truth she is,  
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,  
Not as a succedaneum, and a prop  
To our infirmity. No officious slave  
Art thou of that false secondary power  
By which we multiply distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
That we perceive, and not that we have made.  
To thee, unblinded by these formal arts,  
The unity of all hath been revealed,  
And thou wilt doubt, with me less aptly skilled  
Than many are to range the faculties

## THE PRELUDE

In scale and order, class the cabinet  
Of their sensations, and in voluble phrase  
Run through the history and birth of each  
As of a single independent thing.  
Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the mind,  
If each most obvious and particular thought,  
Not in a mystical and idle sense,  
But in the words of Reason deeply weighed,  
Hath no beginning.

Blest the infant Babe,  
(For with my best conjecture I would trace  
Our Being's earthly progress,) blest the Babe,  
Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep  
Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul  
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!  
For him, in one dear Presence, there exists  
A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
Objects through widest intercourse of sense;  
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:  
Along his infant veins are interfused  
The gravitation and the filial bond  
Of Nature that connect him with the world.  
Is there a flower, to which he points with hand  
Too weak to gather it, already love  
Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him  
Hath beautified that flower; already shades

## SCHOOL-TIME

Of pity cast from inward tenderness  
Do fall around him upon aught that bears  
Unsightly marks of violence or harm.  
Emphatically such a Being lives,  
Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,  
An inmate of this active universe:  
For, feeling has to him imparted power  
That through the growing faculties of sense  
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind  
Create, creator and receiver both,  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds. — Such, verily, is the first  
Poetic spirit of our human life,  
By uniform control of after years,  
In most, abated or suppressed; in some,  
Through every change of growth and of decay,  
Pre-eminent till death.

From early days,  
Beginning not long after that first time  
In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch  
I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart,  
I have endeavoured to display the means  
Whereby this infant sensibility,  
Great birthright of our being, was in me  
Augmented and sustained. Yet is a path  
More difficult before me; and I fear

## THE PRELUDE

That in its broken windings we shall need  
The chamois' sinews, and the eagle's wing:  
For now a trouble came into my mind  
From unknown causes. I was left alone  
Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.  
The props of my affections were removed,  
And yet the building stood, as if sustained  
By its own spirit! All that I beheld  
Was dear, and hence to finer influxes  
The mind lay open to a more exact  
And close communion. Many are our joys  
In youth, but oh! what happiness to live  
When every hour brings palpable access  
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,  
And sorrow is not there! The seasons came,  
And every season wheresoe'er I moved  
Unfolded transitory qualities,  
Which, but for this most watchful power of love,  
Had been neglected; left a register  
Of permanent relations, else unknown.  
Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude  
More active ever than "best society" —  
Society made sweet as solitude  
By silent inobtrusive sympathies,  
And gentle agitations of the mind  
From manifold distinctions, difference

## SCHOOL-TIME

Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,  
No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone,  
Under the quiet stars, and at that time  
Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
If the night blackened with a coming storm,  
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are  
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.  
Thence did I drink the visionary power;  
And deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
That they are kindred to our purer mind  
And intellectual life; but that the soul,  
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
Of possible sublimity, whereto  
With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
With faculties still growing, feeling still  
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet  
Have something to pursue.

And not alone,  
'Mid gloom and tumult, but no less 'mid fair  
And tranquil scenes, that universal power

## THE PRELUDE

And fitness in the latent qualities  
And essences of things, by which the mind  
Is moved with feelings of delight, to me  
Came strengthened with a superadded soul,  
A virtue not its own. My morning walks  
Were early; — oft before the hours of school  
I travelled round our little lake, five miles  
Of pleasant wandering. Happy time! more dear  
For this, that one was by my side, a Friend,<sup>3</sup>  
Then passionately loved; with heart how full  
Would he peruse these lines! For many years  
Have since flowed in between us, and, our minds  
Both silent to each other, at this time  
We live as if those hours had never been.  
Nor seldom did I lift our cottage latch  
Far earlier, ere one smoke-wreath had risen  
From human dwelling, or the vernal thrush  
Was audible; and sate among the woods  
Alone upon some jutting eminence,  
At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,  
Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.  
How shall I seek the origin? where find  
Faith in the marvellous things which then I  
felt?

Oft in these moments such a holy calm  
Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes



## SCHOOL-TIME

Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw  
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,  
A prospect in the mind.

'T were long to tell  
What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,  
And what the summer shade, what day and night,  
Evening and morning, sleep and waking, thought  
From sources inexhaustible, poured forth  
To feed the spirit of religious love  
In which I walked with Nature. But let this  
Be not forgotten, that I still retained  
My first creative sensibility;  
That by the regular action of the world  
My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power  
Abode with me; a forming hand, at times  
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;  
A local spirit of his own, at war  
With general tendency, but, for the most,  
Subservient strictly to external things  
With which it communed. An auxiliar light  
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun  
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,  
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on  
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed  
A like dominion, and the midnight storm  
Grew darker in the presence of my eye:

. THE PRELUDE

Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,  
And hence my transport.

Nor should this, perchance,  
Pass unrecorded, that I still have loved  
The exercise and produce of a toil,  
Than analytic industry to me  
More pleasing, and whose character I deem  
Is more poetic as resembling more  
Creative agency. The song would speak  
Of that interminable building reared  
By observation of affinities  
In objects where no brotherhood exists  
To passive minds. My seventeenth year was  
come

And, whether from this habit rooted now  
So deeply in my mind, or from excess  
In the great social principle of life  
Coercing all things into sympathy,  
To unorganic natures were transferred  
My own enjoyments; or the power of truth  
Coming in revelation, did converse  
With things that really are; I, at this time,  
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.  
Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,  
From Nature and her overflowing soul,  
I had received so much, that all my thoughts

## SCHOOL-TIME

Were steeped in feeling; I was only then  
Contented, when with bliss ineffable  
I felt the sentiment of Being spread  
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;  
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought  
And human knowledge, to the human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;  
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,  
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides  
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,  
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not  
If high the transport, great the joy I felt,  
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven  
With every form of creature, as it looked  
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance  
Of adoration, with an eye of love.  
One song they sang, and it was audible,  
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,  
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,  
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.

If this be error, and another faith  
Find easier access to the pious mind,  
Yet were I grossly destitute of all  
Those human sentiments that make this earth  
So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice

## THE PRELUDE

To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes  
And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds  
That dwell among the hills where I was born.  
If in my youth I have been pure in heart,  
If, mingling with the world, I am content  
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived  
With God and Nature communing, removed  
From little enmities and low desires —  
The gift is yours; if in these times of fear,  
This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,  
If, 'mid indifference and apathy,  
And wicked exultation when good men  
On every side fall off, we know not how,  
To selfishness, disguised in gentle names  
Of peace and quiet and domestic love  
Yet mingled not unwillingly with sneers  
On visionary minds; if, in this time  
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet  
Despair not of our nature, but retain  
A more than Roman confidence, a faith  
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,  
The blessing of my life — the gift is yours,  
Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 't is yours,  
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed  
My lofty speculations; and in thee,  
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find

## SCHOOL-TIME

A never-failing principle of joy  
And purest passion.

Thou, my Friend! wert reared  
In the great city, 'mid far other scenes;  
But we, by different roads, at length have gained  
The selfsame bourne. And for this cause to thee  
I speak, unapprehensive of contempt,  
The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,  
And all that silent language which so oft  
In conversation between man and man  
Blots from the human countenance all trace  
Of beauty and of love. For thou hast sought  
The truth in solitude, and, since the days '  
That gave thee liberty, full long desired,  
To serve in Nature's temple, thou hast been  
The most assiduous of her ministers;  
In many things my brother, chiefly here  
In this our deep devotion.

Fare thee well!

Health and the quiet of a healthful mind  
Attend thee! seeking oft the haunts of men,  
And yet more often living with thyself,  
And for thyself, so haply shall thy days  
Be many, and a blessing to mankind.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK THIRD

### RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

It was a dreary morning when the wheels  
Rolled over a wide plain o'erhung with clouds,  
And nothing cheered our way till first we saw  
The long-roofed chapel of King's College lift  
Turrets and pinnacles in answering files,  
Extended high above a dusky grove.

Advancing, we espied upon the road  
A student clothed in gown and tasselled cap,  
Striding along as if o'ertasked by Time,  
Or covetous of exercise and air;  
He passed — nor was I master of my eyes  
Till he was left an arrow's flight behind.  
As near and nearer to the spot we drew,  
It seemed to suck us in with an eddy's force.  
Onward we drove beneath the Castle; caught,  
While crossing Magdalene Bridge, a glimpse of Cam;  
And at the *Hoop* alighted, famous Inn.

My spirit was up, my thoughts were full of hope;  
Some friends I had, acquaintances who there  
Seemed friends, poor simple schoolboys, now hung  
round



## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

With honour and importance: in a world  
Of welcome faces up and down I roved;  
Questions, directions, warnings and advice,  
Flowed in upon me, from all sides; fresh day  
Of pride and pleasure! to myself I seemed  
A man of business and expense, and went  
From shop to shop about my own affairs,  
To Tutor or to Tailor, as befell,  
From street to street with loose and careless mind.

I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed  
Delighted through the motley spectacle;  
Gowns grave, or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,  
Courts, cloisters, flocks of churches, gateways,  
towers:

Migration strange for a stripling of the hills,  
A northern villager.

As if the change  
Had waited on some Fairy's wand, at once  
Behold me rich in monies, and attired  
In splendid garb, with hose of silk, and hair  
Powdered like rimy trees, when frost is keen.  
My lordly dressing-gown, I pass it by,  
With other signs of manhood that supplied  
The lack of beard. — The weeks went roundly on,  
With invitations, suppers, wine and fruit,

## THE PRELUDE

Smooth housekeeping within, and all without  
Liberal, and suiting gentleman's array.

The Evangelist St. John my patron was:  
Three Gothic courts are his, and in the first  
Was my abiding-place, a nook obscure;  
Right underneath, the College kitchens made  
A humming sound, less tuneable than bees,  
But hardly less industrious; with shrill notes  
Of sharp command and scolding intermixed.  
Near me hung Trinity's loquacious clock,  
Who never let the quarters, night or day,  
Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours  
Twice over with a male and female voice.  
Her pealing organ was my neighbour too;  
And from my pillow, looking forth by light  
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold  
The antechapel where the statue stood  
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

Of College labours, of the Lecturer's room  
All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand,  
With loyal students, faithful to their books,  
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

And honest dunces — of important days,  
Examinations, when the man was weighed  
As in a balance! of excessive hopes,  
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,  
Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad —  
Let others that know more speak as they know.  
Such glory was but little sought by me,  
And little won. Yet from the first crude days  
Of settling time in this untried abode,  
I was disturbed at times by prudent thoughts,  
Wishing to hope without a hope, some fears  
About my future worldly maintenance,  
And, more than all, a strangeness in the mind,  
A feeling that I was not for that hour,  
Nor for that place. But wherefore be cast down?  
For (not to speak of Reason and her pure  
Reflective acts to fix the moral law  
Deep in the conscience, nor of Christian Hope,  
Bowing her head before her sister Faith  
As one far mightier), hither I had come,  
Bear witness Truth, endowed with holy powers  
And faculties, whether to work or feel.  
Oft when the dazzling show no longer new  
Had ceased to dazzle, oftentimes did I quit  
My comrades, leave the crowd, buildings and groves,  
And as I paced alone the level fields

## THE PRELUDE

Far from those lovely sights and sounds sublime  
With which I had been conversant, the mind  
Drooped not; but there into herself returning,  
With proper rebound seemed fresh as heretofore.  
At least I more distinctly recognised  
Her native instincts: let me dare to speak  
A higher language, say that now I felt  
What independent solaces were mine,  
To mitigate the injurious sway of place  
Or circumstance, how far soever changed  
In youth, or *to* be changed in after years.  
As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,  
I looked for universal things; perused  
The common countenance of earth and sky:  
Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace  
Of that first Paradise whence man was driven;  
And sky, whose beauty and bounty are expressed  
By the proud name she bears — the name of Heaven.  
I called on both to teach me what they might;  
Or, turning the mind in upon herself,  
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts  
And spread them with a wider creeping; felt  
Incumbencies more awful, visitings  
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul,  
That tolerates the indignities of Time,  
And, from the centre of Eternity

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

All finite motions overruling, lives  
In glory immutable. But peace! enough  
Here to record that I was mounting now  
To such community with highest truth —  
A track pursuing, not untrod before,  
From strict analogies by thought supplied  
Or consciousnesses not to be subdued,  
To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,  
I gave moral life: I saw them feel,  
Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass  
Lay imbedded in a quickening soul, and all  
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.  
Add that whate'er of Terror or of Love  
Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on  
From transitory passion, unto this  
I was as sensitive as waters are  
To the sky's influence in a kindred mood  
Of passion; was obedient as a lute  
That waits upon the touches of the wind.  
Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich —  
I had a world about me — 't was my own;  
I made it, for it only lived to me,  
And to the God who sees into the heart.  
Such sympathies, though rarely, were betrayed  
By outward gestures and by visible looks:

## THE PRELUDE

Some called it madness — so indeed it was,  
If child-like fruitfulness in passing joy,  
If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured  
To inspiration, sort with such a name;  
If prophecy be madness; if things viewed  
By poets in old time, and higher up  
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,  
May in these tutored days no more be seen  
With undisordered sight. But leaving this,  
It was no madness, for the bodily eye  
Amid my strongest workings evermore  
Was searching out the lines of difference  
As they lie hid in all external forms,  
Near or remote, minute or vast; an eye  
Which, from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,  
To the broad ocean and the azure heavens  
Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,  
Could find no surface where its power might sleep;  
Which spake perpetual logic to my soul,  
And by an unrelenting agency  
Did bind my feelings even as in a chain.

And here, O Friend! have I retraced my life  
Up to an eminence, and told a tale  
Of matters which not falsely may be called  
The glory of my youth. Of genius, power,



## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

Creation and divinity itself

I have been speaking, for my theme has been  
What has passed within me. Not of outward things  
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,  
Symbols or actions, but of my own heart  
Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.  
O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls,  
And what they do within themselves while yet  
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world  
Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.  
This is, in truth, heroic argument,  
This genuine prowess, which I wished to touch  
With hand however weak, but in the main  
It lies far hidden from the reach of words.  
Points have we all of us within our souls  
Where all stand single; this I feel, and make  
Breathings for incommunicable powers;  
But is not each a memory to himself,  
And, therefore, now that we must quit this theme,  
I am not heartless, for there's not a man  
That lives who hath not known his god-like hours,  
And feels not what an empire we inherit  
As natural beings in the strength of Nature.

No more: for now into a populous plain  
We must descend. A Traveller I am,

## THE PRELUDE

Whose tale is only of himself; even so,  
So be it, if the pure of heart be prompt  
To follow, and if thou, my honoured Friend!  
Who in these thoughts art ever at my side,  
Support, as heretofore, my fainting steps.

It hath been told, that when the first delight  
That flashed upon me from this novel show  
Had failed, the mind returned into herself;  
Yet true it is, that I had made a change  
In climate, and my nature's outward coat  
Changed also slowly and insensibly.  
Full oft the quiet and exalted thoughts  
Of loneliness gave way to empty noise  
And superficial pastimes; now and then  
Forced labour, and more frequently forced hopes;  
And, worst of all, a treasonable growth  
Of indecisive judgments, that impaired  
And shook the mind's simplicity. — And yet  
This was a gladsome time. Could I behold —  
Who, less insensible than sodden clay  
In a sea-river's bed at ebb of tide,  
Could have beheld — with undelighted heart,  
So many happy youths, so wide and fair  
A congregation in its budding-time  
Of health, and hope, and beauty, all at once

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

So many divers samples from the growth  
Of life's sweet season — could have seen unmoved  
That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers  
Decking the matron temples of a place  
So famous through the world? To me, at least,  
It was a goodly prospect: for, in sooth,  
Though I had learnt betimes to stand unpropped,  
And independent musings pleased me so  
That spells seemed on me when I was alone,  
Yet could I only cleave to solitude  
In lonely places; if a throng was near  
That way I leaned by nature; for my heart  
Was social, and loved idleness and joy.

Not seeking those who might participate  
My deeper pleasures (nay, I had not once,  
Though not unused to mutter lonesome songs,  
Even with myself divided such delight,  
Or looked that way for aught that might be clothed  
In human language), easily I passed  
From the remembrances of better things,  
And slipped into the ordinary works  
Of careless youth, unburthened, unalarmed.  
*Caverns* there were within my mind which sun  
Could never penetrate, yet did there not  
Want store of leafy *arbours* where the light

## THE PRELUDE

Might enter in at will. Companionships,  
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all.  
We sauntered, played, or rioted; we talked  
Unprofitable talk at morning hours;  
Drifted about along the streets and walks,  
Read lazily in trivial books, went forth  
To gallop through the country in blind zeal  
Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast  
Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars  
Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

Such was the tenor of the second act  
In this new life. Imagination slept,  
And yet not utterly. I could not print  
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps  
Of generations of illustrious men,  
Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass  
Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept,  
Wake where they waked, range that inclosure old,  
That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.  
Place also by the side of this dark sense  
Of noble feeling, that those spiritual men,  
Even the great Newton's own ethereal self,  
Seemed humbled in these precincts, thence to be  
The more endeared. Their several memories here  
(Even like their persons in their portraits clothed

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

With the accustomed garb of daily life)  
Put on a lowly and a touching grace  
Of more distinct humanity, that left  
All genuine admiration unimpaired.

Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington  
I laughed with Chaucer in the hawthorn shade;  
Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales  
Of amorous passion. And that gentle Bard,  
Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State —  
Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven  
With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,  
I called him Brother, Englishman, and Friend!  
Yea, our blind Poet, who in his later day,  
Stood almost single; uttering odious truth —  
Darkness before, and danger's voice behind,  
Soul awful — if the earth has ever lodged  
An awful soul — I seemed to see him here  
Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress  
Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth —  
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks  
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,  
And conscious step of purity and pride.  
Among the band of my compeers was one  
Whom chance had stationed in the very room  
Honoured by Milton's name. O temperate Bard!

## THE PRELUDE

Be it confest that, for the first time, seated  
Within thy innocent lodge and oratory,  
One of a festive circle, I poured out  
Libations, to thy memory drank, till pride  
And gratitude grew dizzy in a brain  
Never excited by the fumes of wine  
Before that hour, or since. Then, forth I ran  
From the assembly; through a length of streets,  
Ran, ostrich-like, to reach our chapel door  
In not a desperate or opprobrious time,  
Albeit long after the importunate bell  
Had stopped, with wearisome Cassandra voice  
No longer haunting the dark winter night.  
Call back, O Friend! a moment to thy mind,  
The place itself and fashion of the rites.  
With careless ostentation shouldering up  
My surplice, through the inferior throng I clove  
Of the plain Burghers, who in audience stood  
On the last skirts of their permitted ground,  
Under the pealing organ. Empty thoughts!  
I am ashamed of them: and that great Bard,  
And thou, O Friend! who in thy ample mind  
Hast placed me high above my best deserts,  
Ye will forgive the weakness of that hour,  
In some of its unworthy vanities,  
Brother to many more.



## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

In this mixed sort  
The months passed on, remissly, not given up  
To wilful alienation from the right,  
Or walks of open scandal, but in vague  
And loose indifference, easy likings, aims  
Of a low pitch — duty and zeal dismissed,  
Yet Nature, or a happy course of things  
Not doing in their stead the needful work.  
The memory languidly revolved, the heart  
Reposed in noontide rest, the inner pulse  
Of contemplation almost failed to beat.  
Such life might not inaptly be compared  
To a floating island, an amphibious spot  
Unsound, of spongy texture, yet withal  
Not wanting a fair face of water weeds  
And pleasant flowers. The thirst of living praise,  
Fit reverence for the glorious Dead, the sight  
Of those long vistas, sacred catacombs,  
Where mighty *minds* lie visibly entombed,  
Have often stirred the heart of youth, and bred  
A fervent love of rigorous discipline. —  
Alas! such high emotion touched not me.  
Look was there none within these walls to shame  
My easy spirits, and discountenance  
Their light composure, far less to instil  
A calm resolve of mind, firmly addressed

## THE PRELUDE

To puissant efforts. Nor was this the blame  
Of others but my own; I should, in truth,  
As far as doth concern my single self,  
Misdeem most widely, lodging it elsewhere:  
For I, bred up 'mid Nature's luxuries,  
Was a spoiled child, and, rambling like the wind,  
As I had done in daily intercourse  
With those crystalline rivers, solemn heights,  
And mountains, ranging like a fowl of the air,  
I was ill-tutored for captivity;  
To quit my pleasure, and, from month to month,  
Take up a station calmly on the perch  
Of sedentary peace. Those lovely forms  
Had also left less space within my mind,  
Which, wrought upon instinctively, had found  
A freshness in those objects of her love,  
A winning power, beyond all other power.  
Not that I slighted books, — that were to lack  
All sense, — but other passions in me ruled,  
Passions more fervent, making me less prompt  
To in-door study than was wise or well,  
Or suited to those years. Yet I, though used  
In magisterial liberty to rove,  
Culling such flowers of learning as might tempt  
A random choice, could shadow forth a place  
(If now I yield not to a flattering dream)

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

Whose studious aspect should have bent me down  
To instantaneous service; should at once  
Have made me pay to science and to arts  
And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord,  
A homage frankly offered up, like that  
Which I had paid to Nature. Toil and pains  
In this recess, by thoughtful Fancy built,  
Should spread from heart to heart; and stately groves,  
Majestic edifices, should not want  
A corresponding dignity within.  
The congregating temper that pervades  
Our unripe years, not wasted, should be taught  
To minister to works of high attempt —  
Works which the enthusiast would perform with love.  
Youth should be awed, religiously possessed  
With a conviction of the power that waits  
On knowledge, when sincerely sought and prized  
For its own sake, on glory and on praise  
If but by labour won, and fit to endure  
The passing day; should learn to put aside  
Her trappings here, should strip them off abashed  
Before antiquity and stedfast truth  
And strong book-mindedness; and over all  
A healthy sound simplicity should reign,  
A seemly plainness, name it what you will,  
Republican or pious.

## THE PRELUDE

If these thoughts  
Are a gratuitous emblazonry  
That mocks the recreant age *we* live in, then  
Be Folly and False-seeming free to affect  
Whatever formal gait of discipline  
Shall raise them highest in their own esteem —  
Let them parade among the Schools at will,  
But spare the House of God. Was ever known  
The witless shepherd who persists to drive  
A flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked?  
A weight must surely hang on days begun  
And ended with such mockery. Be wise,  
Ye Presidents and Deans, and, till the spirit  
Of ancient times revive, and youth be trained  
At home in pious service, to your bells  
Give seasonable rest, for 't is a sound  
Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air;  
And your officious doings bring disgrace  
On the plain steeples of our English Church,  
Whose worship, 'mid remotest village trees,  
Suffers for this. Even Science, too, at hand  
In daily sight of this irreverence,  
Is smitten thence with an unnatural taint,  
Loses her just authority, falls beneath  
Collateral suspicion, else unknown.  
This truth escaped me not, and I confess,

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

That having 'mid my native hills given loose  
To a schoolboy's vision, I had raised a pile  
Upon the basis of the coming time,  
That fell in ruins round me. Oh, what joy  
To see a sanctuary for our country's youth  
Informed with such a spirit as might be  
Its own protection; a primeval grove,  
Where, though the shades with cheerfulness were filled,  
Nor indigent of songs warbled from crowds  
In under-coverts, yet the countenance  
Of the whole place should bear a stamp of awe;  
A habitation sober and demure  
For ruminating creatures; a domain  
For quiet things to wander in; a haunt  
In which the heron should delight to feed  
By the shy rivers, and the pelican  
Upon the cypress spire in lonely thought  
Might sit and sun himself. — Alas! Alas!  
In vain for such solemnity I looked;  
Mine eyes were crossed by butterflies, ears vexed  
By chattering popinjays; the inner heart  
Seemed trivial, and the impresses without  
Of a too gaudy region.

Different sight

Those venerable Doctors saw of old,  
When all who dwelt within these famous walls

## THE PRELUDE

Led in abstemiousness a studious life;  
When, in forlorn and naked chambers cooped  
And crowded, o'er the ponderous books they hung  
Like caterpillars eating out their way  
In silence, or with keen devouring noise  
Not to be tracked or fathered. Princes then  
At matins froze, and couched at curfew-time,  
Trained up through piety and zeal to prize  
Spare diet, patient labour, and plain weeds.  
O seat of Arts! renowned throughout the world!  
Far different service in those homely days  
The Muses' modest nurslings underwent  
From their first childhood: in that glorious time  
When Learning, like a stranger come from far,  
Sounding through Christian lands her trumpet, roused  
Peasant and king; when boys and youths, the growth  
Of ragged villages and crazy huts,  
Forsook their homes, and, errant in the quest  
Of Patron, famous school or friendly nook,  
Where, pensioned, they in shelter might sit down,  
From town to town and through wide scattered realms  
Journeyed with ponderous folios in their hands;  
And often, starting from some covert place,  
Saluted the chance comer on the road,  
Crying, "An obolus, a penny give  
To a poor scholar!" — when illustrious men,



## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

Lovers of truth, by penury constrained,  
Bucer, Erasmus, or Melancthon, read  
Before the doors or windows of their cells  
By moonshine through mere lack of taper light.

But peace to vain regrets! We see but darkly  
Even when we look behind us, and best things  
Are not so pure by nature that they needs  
Must keep to all, as fondly all believe,  
Their highest promise. If the mariner,  
When at reluctant distance he hath passed  
Some tempting island, could but know the ills  
That must have fallen upon him had he brought  
His bark to land upon the wished-for shore,  
Good cause would oft be his to thank the surf  
Whose white belt scared him thence, or wind that blew  
Inexorably adverse: for myself  
I grieve not; happy is the gownèd youth,  
Who only misses what I missed, who falls  
No lower than I fell.

I did not love,  
Judging not ill perhaps, the timid course  
Of our scholastic studies; could have wished  
To see the river flow with ampler range  
And freer pace; but more, far more, I grieved  
To see displayed among an eager few,

## THE PRELUDE

Who in the field of contest persevered,  
Passions unworthy of youth's generous heart  
And mounting spirit, pitiably repaid,  
When so disturbed, whatever palms are won.  
From these I turned to travel with the shoal  
Of more unthinking natures, easy minds  
And pillowy; yet not wanting love that makes  
The day pass lightly on, when foresight sleeps,  
And wisdom and the pledges interchanged  
With our own inner being are forgot.

Yet was this deep vacation not given up  
To utter waste. Hitherto I had stood  
In my own mind remote from social life,  
(At least from what we commonly so name,)  
Like a lone shepherd on a promontory,  
Who lacking occupation looks far forth  
Into the boundless sea, and rather makes  
Than finds what he beholds. And sure it is,  
That this first transit from the smooth delights  
And wild outlandish walks of simple youth  
To something that resembles an approach  
Towards human business, to a privileged world  
Within a world, a midway residence  
With all its intervenient imagery,  
Did better suit my visionary mind,

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

Far better, than to have been bolted forth,  
Thrust out abruptly into Fortune's way  
Among the conflicts of substantial life;  
By a more just gradation did lead on  
To higher things; more naturally matured,  
For permanent possession, better fruits,  
Whether of truth or virtue, to ensue.  
In serious mood, but oftener, I confess,  
With playful zest of fancy, did we note  
(How could we less?) the manners and the ways  
Of those who lived distinguished by the badge  
Of good or ill report; or those with whom  
By frame of Academic discipline  
We were perforce connected, men whose sway  
And known authority of office served  
To set our minds on edge, and did no more.  
Nor wanted we rich pastime of this kind,  
Found everywhere, but chiefly in the ring  
Of the grave Elders, men unscoured, grotesque  
In character, tricked out like aged trees  
Which through the lapse of their infirmity  
Give ready place to any random seed  
That chooses to be reared upon their trunks.

Here on my view, confronting vividly  
Those shepherd swains whom I had lately left

## THE PRELUDE

Appeared a different aspect of old age;  
How different! yet both distinctly marked,  
Objects embossed to catch the general eye,  
Or portraitures for special use designed,  
As some might seem, so aptly do they serve  
To illustrate Nature's book of rudiments —  
That book upheld as with maternal care  
When she would enter on her tender scheme  
Of teaching comprehension with delight,  
And mingling playful with pathetic thoughts.

The surfaces of artificial life  
And manners finely wrought, the delicate race  
Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down  
Through that state arras woven with silk and gold;  
This wily interchange of snaky hues,  
Willingly or unwillingly revealed,  
I neither knew nor cared for; and as such  
Were wanting here, I took what might be found  
Of less elaborate fabric. At this day  
I smile, in many a mountain solitude  
Conjuring up scenes as obsolete in freaks  
Of character, in points of wit as broad,  
As aught by wooden images performed  
For entertainment of the gaping crowd  
At wake or fair. And oftentimes do flit

## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

Remembrances before me of old men —  
Old humourists, who have been long in their graves,  
And having almost in my mind put off  
Their human names, have into phantoms passed  
Of texture midway between life and books.

I play the loiterer: 't is enough to note  
That here in dwarf proportions were expressed  
The limbs of the great world; its eager strifes  
Collaterally pourtrayed, as in mock fight,  
A tournament of blows, some hardly dealt  
Though short of mortal combat; and whate'er  
Might in this pageant be supposed to hit  
An artless rustic's notice, this way less,  
More that way, was not wasted upon me —  
And yet the spectacle may well demand  
A more substantial name, no mimic show,  
Itself a living part of a live whole,  
A creek in the vast sea; for, all degrees  
And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise  
Here sate in state, and fed with daily alms  
Retainers won away from solid good;  
And here was Labour, his own bond-slave; Hope,  
That never set the pains against the prize;  
Idleness halting with his weary clog,  
And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,

## THE PRELUDE

And simple Pleasure foraging for Death;  
Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray;  
Feuds, factions, flatteries, enmity, and guile,  
Murmuring submission, and bald government,  
(The idol weak as the idolater,)  
And Decency and Custom starving Truth,  
And blind Authority beating with his staff  
The child that might have led him; Emptiness  
Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth  
Left to herself unheard of and unknown.

Of these and other kindred notices  
I cannot say what portion is in truth  
The naked recollection of that time,  
And what may rather have been called to life  
By after-meditation. But delight  
That, in an easy temper lulled asleep,  
Is still with Innocence its own reward,  
This was not wanting. Carelessly I roamed  
As through a wide museum from whose stores  
A casual rarity is singled out  
And has its brief perusal, then gives way  
To others, all supplanted in their turn;  
Till 'mid this crowded neighbourhood of things  
That are by nature most unneighbourly,  
The head turns round and cannot right itself;



## RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE

And though an aching and a barren sense  
Of gay confusion still be uppermost,  
With few wise longings and but little love,  
Yet to the memory something cleaves at last,  
Whence profit may be drawn in times to come.

Thus in submissive idleness, my Friend!  
The labouring time of autumn, winter, spring,  
Eight months! rolled pleasingly away; the ninth  
Came and returned me to my native hills.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK FOURTH

### SUMMER VACATION

BRIGHT was the summer's noon when quickening steps  
Followed each other till a dreary moor  
Was crossed, a bare ridge clomb, upon whose top  
Standing alone, as from a rampart's edge,  
I overlooked the bed of Windermere,  
Like a vast river, stretching in the sun.  
With exultation, at my feet I saw  
Lake, islands, promontories, gleaming bays,  
A universe of Nature's fairest forms  
Proudly revealed with instantaneous burst,  
Magnificent, and beautiful, and gay.  
I bounded down the hill shouting amain  
For the old Ferryman; to the shout the rocks  
Replied, and when the Charon of the flood  
Had staid his oars, and touched the jutting pier,  
I did not step into the well-known boat  
Without a cordial greeting. Thence with speed  
Up the familiar hill I took my way  
Towards that sweet Valley <sup>4</sup> where I had been reared;  
'T was but a short hour's walk, ere veering round  
I saw the snow-white church upon her hill  
Sit like a thronèd Lady, sending out  
A gracious look all over her domain.

## SUMMER VACATION

Yon azure smoke betrays the lurking town;  
With eager footsteps I advance and reach  
The cottage threshold where my journey closed.  
Glad welcome had I, with some tears, perhaps,  
From my old Dame, so kind and motherly,  
While she perused me with a parent's pride.  
The thoughts of gratitude shall fall like dew  
Upon thy grave, good creature! While my heart  
Can beat never will I forget thy name.  
Heaven's blessing be upon thee where thou liest  
After thy innocent and busy stir  
In narrow cares, thy little daily growth  
Of calm enjoyments, after eighty years,  
And more than eighty, of untroubled life;  
Childless, yet by the strangers to thy blood  
Honoured with little less than filial love.  
What joy was mine to see thee once again,  
Thee and thy dwelling, and a crowd of things  
About its narrow precincts all beloved,  
And many of them seeming yet my own!  
Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts  
Have felt, and every man alive can guess?  
The rooms, the court, the garden were not left  
Long unsaluted, nor the sunny seat  
Round the stone table under the dark pine,  
Friendly to studious or to festive hours;

## THE PRELUDE

Nor that unruly child of mountain birth,  
The famous brook, who, soon as he was boxed  
Within our garden, found himself at once,  
As if by trick insidious and unkind,  
Stripped of his voice and left to dimple down  
(Without an effort and without a will)  
A channel paved by man's officious care.  
I looked at him and smiled, and smiled again,  
And in the press of twenty thousand thoughts,  
"Ha," quoth I, "pretty prisoner, are you there?"  
Well might sarcastic Fancy then have whispered,  
"An emblem here behold of thy own life;  
In its late course of even days with all  
Their smooth enthrallment"; but the heart was full,  
Too full for that reproach. My aged Dame  
Walked proudly at my side: she guided me;  
I willing, nay — nay, wishing to be led.  
— The face of every neighbour whom I met  
Was like a volume to me; some were hailed  
Upon the road, some busy at their work,  
Unceremonious greetings interchanged  
With half the length of a long field between.  
Among my schoolfellows I scattered round  
Like recognitions, but with some constraint  
Attended, doubtless, with a little pride,  
But with more shame, for my habiliments,

## SUMMER VACATION

The transformation wrought by gay attire.  
Not less delighted did I take my place  
At our domestic table: and, dear Friend!  
In this endeavour simply to relate  
A Poet's history, may I leave untold  
The thankfulness with which I laid me down  
In my accustomed bed, more welcome now  
Perhaps than if it had been more desired  
Or been more often thought of with regret;  
That lowly bed whence I had heard the wind  
Roar, and the rain beat hard; where I so oft  
Had lain awake on summer nights to watch  
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves  
Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood;  
Had watched her with fixed eyes while to and fro  
In the dark summit of the waving tree  
She rocked with every impulse of the breeze.

Among the favourites whom it pleased me well  
To see again, was one by ancient right  
Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills;  
By birth and call of nature pre-ordained  
To hunt the badger and unearth the fox  
Among the impervious crags, but having been  
From youth our own adopted, he had passed  
Into a gentler service. And when first

## THE PRELUDE

The boyish spirit flagged, and day by day  
Along my veins I kindled with the stir,  
The fermentation, and the vernal heat  
Of poesy, affecting private shades  
Like a sick Lover, then this dog was used  
To watch me, an attendant and a friend,  
Obsequious to my steps early and late,  
Though often of such dilatory walk  
Tired, and uneasy at the halts I made.  
A hundred times when, roving high and low,  
I have been harassed with the toil of verse,  
Much pains and little progress, and at once  
Some lovely Image in the song rose up  
Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea;  
Then have I darted forwards to let loose  
My hand upon his back with stormy joy,  
Caressing him again and yet again.  
And when at evening on the public way  
I sauntered, like a river murmuring  
And talking to itself when all things else  
Are still, the creature trotted on before;  
Such was his custom; but whene'er he met  
A passenger approaching, he would turn  
To give me timely notice, and straightway,  
Grateful for that admonishment, I hushed  
My voice, composed my gait, and, with the air



## SUMMER VACATION

And mien of one whose thoughts are free, advanced  
To give and take a greeting that might save  
My name from piteous rumours, such as wait  
On men suspected to be crazed in brain.

Those walks well worthy to be prized and loved —  
Regretted! — that word, too, was on my tongue,  
But they were richly laden with all good,  
And cannot be remembered but with thanks  
And gratitude, and perfect joy of heart —  
Those walks in all their freshness now came back  
Like a returning Spring. When first I made  
Once more the circuit of our little lake,  
If ever happiness hath lodged with man,  
That day consummate happiness was mine,  
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.  
The sun was set, or setting, when I left  
Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on  
A sober hour, not winning or serene,  
For cold and raw the air was, and untuned:  
But as a face we love is sweetest then  
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look  
It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart  
Have fulness in herself; even so with me  
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul  
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood

## THE PRELUDE

Naked, as in the presence of her God.  
While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch  
A heart that had not been disconsolate:  
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,  
At least not felt; and restoration came  
Like an intruder knocking at the door  
Of unacknowledged weariness. I took  
The balance, and with firm hand weighed myself.  
— Of that external scene which round me lay,  
Little, in this abstraction, did I see;  
Remembered less; but I had inward hopes  
And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,  
Conversed with promises, had glimmering views  
How life pervades the undecaying mind;  
How the immortal soul with God-like power  
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep  
That time can lay<sup>r</sup> upon her; how on earth,  
Man, if he do but live within the light  
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad  
His being armed with strength that cannot fail.  
Nor was there want of milder thoughts, of love,  
Of innocence, and holiday repose;  
And more than pastoral quiet, 'mid the stir  
Of boldest projects, and a peaceful end  
At last, or glorious, by endurance won.  
Thus musing, in a wood I sate me down

## SUMMER VACATION

Alone, continuing there to muse: the slopes  
And heights meanwhile were slowly overspread  
With darkness, and before a rippling breeze  
The long lake lengthened out its hoary line,  
And in the sheltered coppice where I sate,  
Around me from among the hazel leaves,  
Now here, now there, moved by the straggling wind,  
Came ever and anon a breath-like sound,  
Quick as the pantings of the faithful dog,  
The off and on companion of my walk;  
And such, at times, believing them to be,  
I turned my head to look if he were there;  
Then into solemn thought I passed once more.

A freshness also found I at this time  
In human Life, the daily life of those  
Whose occupations really I loved;  
The peaceful scene oft filled me with surprise,  
Changed like a garden in the heat of spring  
After an eight-days' absence. For (to omit  
The things which were the same and yet appeared  
Far otherwise) amid this rural solitude,  
A narrow Vale where each was known to all,  
'T was not indifferent to a youthful mind  
To mark some sheltering bower or sunny nook  
Where an old man had used to sit alone,

## THE PRELUDE

Now vacant; pale-faced babes whom I had left  
In arms, now rosy prattlers at the feet  
Of a pleased grandame tottering up and down;  
And growing girls whose beauty, filched away  
With all its pleasant promises, was gone  
To deck some slighted playmate's homely cheek.

Yes, I had something of a subtler sense,  
And often looking round was moved to smiles  
Such as a delicate work of humour breeds;  
I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts,  
Of those plain-living people now observed  
With clearer knowledge; with another eye  
I saw the quiet woodman in the woods,  
The shepherd roam the hills. With new delight,  
This chiefly, did I note my grey-haired Dame;  
Saw her go forth to church or other work  
Of state equipped in monumental trim;  
Short velvet cloak, (her bonnet of the like),  
A mantle such as Spanish Cavaliers  
Wore in old times. Her smooth domestic life,  
Affectionate without disquietude,  
Her talk, her business, pleased me; and no less  
Her clear though shallow stream of piety  
That ran on Sabbath days a fresher course;  
With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read

## SUMMER VACATION

Her Bible on hot Sunday afternoons,  
And loved the book, when she had dropped asleep  
And made of it a pillow for her head.

Nor less do I remember to have felt,  
Distinctly manifested at this time,  
A human-heartedness about my love  
For objects hitherto the absolute wealth  
Of my own private being and no more;  
Which I have loved, even as a blessed spirit  
Or Angel, if he were to dwell on earth,  
Might love in individual happiness.  
But now there opened on me other thoughts  
Of change, congratulation or regret,  
A pensive feeling! It spread far and wide;  
The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks,  
The stars of Heaven, now seen in their old haunts—  
White Sirius glittering o'er the southern crags,  
Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven,  
Acquaintances of every little child,  
And Jupiter, my own belovèd star!  
Whatever shadings of mortality,  
Whatever imports from the world of death  
Had come among these objects heretofore,  
Were, in the main, of mood less tender: strong,  
Deep, gloomy were they, and severe; the scatterings

## THE PRELUDE

Of awe or tremulous dread, that had given way  
In later youth to yearnings of a love  
Enthusiastic, to delight and hope.

As one who hangs down-bending from the side  
Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast  
Of a still water, solacing himself  
With such discoveries as his eye can make  
Beneath him in the bottom of the deep,  
Sees many beauteous sights — weeds, fishes, flowers,  
Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,  
Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part  
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,  
Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth  
Of the clear flood, from things which there abide  
In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam  
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,  
And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,  
Impediments that make his task more sweet;  
Such pleasant office have we long pursued  
Incumbent o'er the surface of past time  
With like success, nor often have appeared  
Shapes fairer or less doubtfully discerned  
Than these to which the Tale, indulgent Friend!  
Would now direct thy notice. Yet in spite  
Of pleasure won, and knowledge not withheld,



## SUMMER VACATION

There was an inner falling off — I loved,  
Loved deeply all that had been loved before,  
More deeply even than ever: but a swarm  
Of heady schemes jostling each other, gawds,  
And feast and dance, and public revelry,  
And sports and games (too grateful in themselves,  
Yet in themselves less grateful, I believe,  
Than as they were a badge glossy and fresh  
Of manliness and freedom) all conspired  
To lure my mind from firm habitual quest  
Of feeding pleasures, to depress the zeal  
And damp those yearnings which had once been mine —  
A wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up  
To his own eager thoughts. It would demand  
Some skill, and longer time than may be spared  
To paint these vanities, and how they wrought  
In haunts where they, till now, had been unknown.  
It seemed the very garments that I wore  
Preyed on my strength, and stopped the quiet stream  
Of self-forgetfulness.

Yes, that heartless chase  
Of trivial pleasures was a poor exchange  
For books and nature at that early age.  
'T is true, some casual knowledge might be gained  
Of character or life; but at that time,  
Of manners put to school I took small note,

## THE PRELUDE

And all my deeper passions lay elsewhere.  
Far better had it been to exalt the mind  
By solitary study, to uphold  
Intense desire through meditative peace;  
And yet, for chastisement of these regrets,  
The memory of one particular hour  
Doth here rise up against me. 'Mid a throng  
Of maids and youths, old men, and matrons staid,  
A medley of all tempers, I had passed  
The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,  
With din of instruments and shuffling feet,  
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,  
And unaimed prattle flying up and down;  
Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there  
Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed,  
Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head,  
And tingled through the veins. Ere we retired,  
The cock had crowed, and now the eastern sky  
Was kindling, not unseen, from humble copse  
And open field, through which the pathway wound,  
And homeward led my steps. Magnificent  
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,  
Glorious as e'er I had beheld — in front,  
The sea lay laughing at a distance; near,  
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,  
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;

## SUMMER VACATION

And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn —  
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,  
And labourers going forth to till the fields.  
Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to the brim  
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated Spirit. On I walked  
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

Strange rendezvous! My mind was at that time  
A parti-coloured show of grave and gay,  
Solid and light, short-sighted and profound;  
Of inconsiderate habits and sedate,  
Consorting in one mansion unreprieved.  
The worth I knew of powers that I possessed,  
Though slighted and too oft misused. Besides,  
That summer, swarming as it did with thoughts  
Transient and idle, lacked not intervals  
When Folly from the frown of fleeting Time  
Shrunk, and the mind experienced in herself  
Conformity as just as that of old  
To the end and written spirit of God's works,  
Whether held forth in Nature or in Man,  
Through pregnant vision, separate or conjoined.

## THE PRELUDE

When from our better selves we have too long  
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,  
Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,  
How gracious, how benign, is Solitude;  
How potent a mere image of her sway;  
Most potent when impressed upon the mind  
With an appropriate human centre — hermit,  
Deep in the bosom of the wilderness;  
Votary (in vast cathedral, where no foot  
Is treading, where no other face is seen)  
Kneeling at prayers; or watchman on the top  
Of lighthouse, beaten by Atlantic waves;  
Or as the soul of that great Power is met  
Sometimes embodied on a public road,  
When, for the night deserted, it assumes  
A character of quiet more profound  
Than pathless wastes.

Once, when those summer months  
Were flown, and autumn brought its annual show  
Of oars with oars contending, sails with sails,  
Upon Winander's spacious breast, it chanced  
That — after I had left a flower-decked room  
(Whose in-door pastime, lighted up, survived  
To a late hour), and spirits overwrought  
Were making night do penance for a day  
Spent in a round of strenuous idleness —

## SUMMER VACATION

My homeward course led up a long ascent,  
Where the road's watery surface, to the top  
Of that sharp rising, glittered to the moon  
And bore the semblance of another stream  
Stealing with silent lapse to join the brook  
That murmured in the vale. All else was still;  
No living thing appeared in earth or air,  
And, save the flowing water's peaceful voice,  
Sound there was none — but, lo! an uncouth shape,  
Shown by a sudden turning of the road,  
So near that, slipping back into the shade  
Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well,  
Myself unseen. He was of stature tall,  
A span above man's common measure, tall,  
Stiff, lank, and upright; a more meagre man  
Was never seen before by night or day.  
Long were his arms, pallid his hands; his mouth  
Looked ghastly in the moonlight: from behind,  
A mile-stone propped him; I could also ken  
That he was clothed in military garb,  
Though faded, yet entire. Companionless,  
No dog attending, by no staff sustained,  
He stood, and in his very dress appeared  
A desolation, a simplicity,  
To which the trappings of a gaudy world  
Make a strange back-ground. From his lips, ere long,

## THE PRELUDE

Issued low muttered sounds, as if of pain  
Or some uneasy thought; yet still his form  
Kept the same awful steadiness — at his feet  
His shadow lay, and moved not. From self-blame  
Not wholly free, I watched him thus; at length  
Subduing my heart's specious cowardice,  
I left the shady nook where I had stood  
And hailed him. Slowly from his resting-place  
He rose, and with a lean and wasted arm  
In measured gesture lifted to his head  
Returned my salutation; then resumed  
His station as before; and when I asked  
His history, the veteran, in reply,  
Was neither slow nor eager; but, unmoved,  
And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,  
A stately air of mild indifference,  
He told in few plain words a soldier's tale —  
That in the Tropic Islands he had served,  
Whence he had landed scarcely three weeks past;  
That on his landing he had been dismissed,  
And now was travelling towards his native home.  
This heard, I said, in pity, "Come with me."  
He stooped, and straightway from the ground took up  
An oaken staff by me yet unobserved —  
A staff which must have dropped from his slack hand  
And lay till now neglected in the grass.



## SUMMER VACATION

Though weak his step and cautious, he appeared  
To travel without pain, and I beheld,  
With an astonishment but ill suppressed,  
His ghostly figure moving at my side;  
Nor could I, while we journeyed thus, forbear  
To turn from present hardships to the past,  
And speak of war, battle, and pestilence,  
Sprinkling this talk with questions, better spared,  
In what he might himself have seen or felt.  
He all the while was in demeanour calm,  
Concise in answer; solemn and sublime  
He might have seemed, but that in all he said  
There was a strange half-absence, as of one  
Knowing too well the importance of his theme,  
But feeling it no longer. Our discourse  
Soon ended, and together on we passed  
In silence through a wood gloomy and still.  
Up-turning, then, along an open field,  
We reached a cottage. At the door I knocked,  
And earnestly to charitable care  
Commended him as a poor friendless man,  
Belated and by sickness overcome.  
Assured that now the traveller would repose  
In comfort, I entreated that henceforth  
He would not linger in the public ways,  
But ask for timely furtherance and help

## THE PRELUDE

Such as his state required. At this reproof,  
With the same ghastly mildness in his look,  
He said, "My trust is in the God of Heaven,  
And in the eye of him who passes me!"

The cottage door was speedily unbarred,  
And now the soldier touched his hat once more  
With his lean hand, and in a faltering voice,  
Whose tone bespoke reviving interests  
Till then unfelt, he thanked me; I returned  
The farewell blessing of the patient man,  
And so we parted. Back I cast a look,  
And lingered near the door a little space,  
Then sought with quiet heart my distant home.

## BOOKS

### BOOK FIFTH

#### BOOKS

WHEN Contemplation, like the night-calm felt  
Through earth and sky, spreads widely, and sends deep  
Into the soul its tranquillising power,  
Even then I sometimes grieve for thee, O Man,  
Earth's paramount Creature! not so much for woes  
That thou endurest; heavy though that weight be,  
Cloud-like it mounts, or touched with light divine  
Doth melt away; but for those palms achieved  
Through length of time, by patient exercise  
Of study and hard thought; there, there, it is  
That sadness finds its fuel. Hitherto,  
In progress through this Verse, my mind hath looked  
Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven  
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man  
Established by the sovereign Intellect,  
Who through that bodily image hath diffused,  
As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,  
A deathless spirit. Thou also, man! hast wrought,  
For commerce of thy nature with herself,  
Things that aspire to unconquerable life;  
And yet we feel — we cannot choose but feel —  
That they must perish. Tremblings of the heart  
It gives, to think that our immortal being

## THE PRELUDE

No more shall need such garments; and yet man,  
As long as he shall be the child of earth,  
Might almost "weep to have" what he may lose,  
Nor be himself extinguished, but survive,  
Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.  
A thought is with me sometimes, and I say, —  
Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes  
Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch  
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up  
Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare,  
Yet would the living Presence still subsist  
Victorious, and composure would ensue,  
And kindlings like the morning — presage sure  
Of day returning and of life revived.  
But all the meditations of mankind,  
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth  
By reason built, or passion, which itself  
Is highest reason in a soul sublime;  
The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,  
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,  
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;  
Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the Mind  
Some element to stamp her image on  
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?  
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad  
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

## BOOKS

One day, when from my lips a like complaint  
Had fallen in presence of a studious friend,  
He with a smile made answer, that in truth  
'T was going far to seek disquietude;  
But on the front of his reproof confessed  
That he himself had oftentimes given way  
To kindred hauntings. Whereupon I told,  
That once in the stillness of a summer's noon,  
While I was seated in a rocky cave  
By the sea-side, perusing, so it chanced,  
The famous history of the errant knight  
Recorded by Cervantes, these same thoughts  
Beset me, and to height unusual rose,  
While listlessly I sate, and, having closed  
The book, had turned my eyes toward the wide sea.  
On poetry and geometric truth,  
And their high privilege of lasting life,  
From all internal injury exempt,  
I mused; upon these chiefly: and at length,  
My senses yielding to the sultry air,  
Sleep seized me, and I passed into a dream.  
I saw before me stretched a boundless plain  
Of sandy wilderness, all black and void,  
And as I looked around, distress and fear  
Came creeping over me, when at my side,  
Close at my side, an uncouth shape appeared

## THE PRELUDE

Upon a dromedary, mounted high.  
He seemed an Arab of the Bedouin tribes:  
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm  
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell  
Of a surpassing brightness. At the sight  
Much I rejoiced, not doubting but a guide  
Was present, one who with unerring skill  
Would through the desert lead me; and while yet  
I looked and looked, self-questioned what this freight  
Which the new-comer carried through the waste  
Could mean, the Arab told me that the stone  
(To give it in the language of the dream)  
Was "Euclid's Elements," and "This," said he,  
"Is something of more worth"; and at the word  
Stretched forth the shell, so beautiful in shape,  
In colour so resplendent, with command  
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so,  
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,  
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,  
A loud prophetic blast of harmony;  
An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold  
Destruction to the children of the earth  
By deluge, now at hand. No sooner ceased  
The song, than the Arab with calm look declared  
That all would come to pass of which the voice  
Had given forewarning, and that he himself



## BOOKS

Was going then to bury those two books:  
The one that held acquaintance with the stars,  
And wedded soul to soul in purest bond  
Of reason, undisturbed by space or time;  
The other that was a god, yea many gods,  
Had voices more than all the winds, with power  
To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,  
Through every clime, the heart of human kind.  
While this was uttering, strange as it may seem,  
I wondered not, although I plainly saw  
The one to be a stone, the other a shell;  
Nor doubted once but that they both were books,  
Having a perfect faith in all that passed.  
Far stronger, now, grew the desire I felt  
To cleave unto this man; but when I prayed  
To share his enterprise, he hurried on  
Reckless of me: I followed, not unseen,  
For oftentimes he cast a backward look,  
Grasping his twofold treasure. — Lance in rest,  
He rode, I keeping pace with him; and now  
He, to my fancy, had become the knight  
Whose tale Cervantes tells; yet not the knight,  
But was an Arab of the desert too;  
Of these was neither, and was both at once.  
His countenance, meanwhile, grew more disturbed;  
And, looking backwards when he looked, mine eyes

## THE PRELUDE

Saw, over half the wilderness diffused,  
A bed of glittering light: I asked the cause:  
“It is,” said he, “the waters of the deep  
Gathering upon us”; quickening then the pace  
Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode,  
He left me: I called after him aloud;  
He heeded not; but, with his twofold charge  
Still in his grasp, before me, full in view,  
Went hurrying o’er the illimitable waste,  
With the fleet waters of a drowning world  
In chase of him; whereat I waked in terror,  
And saw the sea before me, and the book,  
In which I had been reading, at my side.

§ 111 .

Full often, taking from the world of sleep  
This Arab phantom, which I thus beheld,  
This semi-Quixote, I to him have given  
A substance, fancied him a living man,  
A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed  
By love and feeling, and internal thought  
Protracted among endless solitudes;  
Have shaped him wandering upon this quest!  
Nor have I pitied him; but rather felt  
Reverence was due to a being thus employed;  
And thought that, in the blind and awful lair  
Of such a madness, reason did lie couched.

## BOOKS

Enow there are on earth to take in charge  
Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,  
Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear;  
Enow to stir for these; yea, will I say,  
Contemplating in soberness the approach  
Of an event so dire, by signs in earth  
Or heaven made manifest, that I could share  
That maniac's fond anxiety, and go  
Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least  
Me hath such strong entrancement overcome,  
When I have held a volume in my hand,  
Poor earthly casket of immortal verse,  
Shakespeare, or Milton, labourers divine!

Great and benign, indeed, must be the power  
Of living nature, which could thus so long  
Detain me from the best of other guides  
And dearest helpers, left unthanked, unpraised,  
Even in the time of lisping infancy;  
And later down, in prattling childhood even,  
While I was travelling back among those days,  
How could I ever play an ingrate's part?  
Once more should I have made those bowers resound,  
By intermingling strains of thankfulness  
With their own thoughtless melodies; at least  
It might have well beseemed me to repeat

## THE PRELUDE

Some simply fashioned tale, to tell again,  
In slender accents of sweet verse, some tale  
That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now.  
O Friend! O Poet! brother of my soul,  
Think not that I could pass along untouched  
By these remembrances. Yet wherefore speak?  
Why call upon a few weak words to say  
What is already written in the hearts  
Of all that breathe? — what in the path of all  
Drops daily from the tongue of every child,  
Wherever man is found? The trickling tear  
Upon the cheek of listening Infancy  
Proclaims it, and the insuperable look  
That drinks as if it never could be full.

That portion of my story I shall leave  
There registered: whatever else of power  
Or pleasure sown, or fostered thus, may be  
Peculiar to myself, let that remain  
Where still it works, though hidden from all search  
Among the depths of time. Yet is it just  
That here, in memory of all books which lay  
Their sure foundations in the heart of man,  
Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,  
That in the name of all inspirèd souls —  
From Homer the great Thunderer, from the voice

## BOOKS

That roars along the bed of Jewish song,  
And that more varied and elaborate,  
Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake  
Our shores in England, — from those loftiest notes  
Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made  
For cottagers and spinners at the wheel,  
And sun-burnt travellers resting their tired limbs,  
Stretched under wayside hedge-rows, ballad tunes,  
Food for the hungry ears of little ones,  
And of old men who have survived their joys —  
'T is just that in behalf of these, the works,  
And of the men that framed them, whether known  
Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves,  
That I should here assert their rights, attest  
Their honours, and should, once for all, pronounce  
Their benediction; speak of them as Powers  
For ever to be hallowed; only less,  
For what we are and what we may become,  
Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God,  
Or His pure Word by miracle revealed.

Rarely and with reluctance would I stoop  
To transitory themes; yet I rejoice,  
And, by these thoughts admonished, will pour out  
Thanks with uplifted heart, that I was reared  
Safe from an evil which these days have laid

## THE PRELUDE

Upon the children of the land, a pest  
That might have dried me up, body and soul.  
This verse is dedicate to Nature's self,  
And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,  
Oh! where had been the Man, the Poet where,  
Where had we been, we two, belovèd Friend!  
If in the season of unperilous choice,  
In lieu of wandering, as we did, through vales  
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground  
Of Fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,  
We had been followed, hourly watched, and noosed,  
Each in his several melancholy walk  
Stringed like a poor man's heifer at its feed,  
Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;  
Or rather like a stallèd ox debarred  
From touch of growing grass, that may not taste  
A flower till it have yielded up its sweets  
A prelibation to the mower's scythe.

Behold the parent hen hid amid her brood,  
Though fledged and feathered, and well pleased to part  
And straggle from her presence, still a brood,  
And she herself from the maternal bond  
Still undischarged; yet doth she little more  
Than move with them in tenderness and love,  
A centre to the circle which they make;



## BOOKS

And now and then, alike from need of theirs  
And call of her own natural appetites,  
She scratches, ransacks up the earth for food,  
Which they partake at pleasure. Early died  
My honoured Mother, she who was the heart  
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves:  
She left us destitute, and, as we might,  
Trooping together. Little suits it me  
To break upon the sabbath of her rest  
With any thought that looks at others' blame;  
Nor would I praise her but in perfect love.  
Hence am I checked: but let me boldly say,  
In gratitude, and for the sake of truth,  
Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,  
Fetching her goodness rather from times past,  
Than shaping novelties for times to come,  
Had no presumption, no such jealousy,  
Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust  
Our nature, but had virtual faith that He  
Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,  
Doth also for our nobler part provide,  
Under His great correction and control,  
As innocent instincts, and as innocent food;  
Or draws, for minds that are left free to trust  
In the simplicities of opening life,  
Sweet honey out of spurned or dreaded weeds.

## THE PRELUDE

This was her creed, and therefore she was pure  
From anxious fear of error or mishap,  
And evil, overweeningly so called;  
Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,  
Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,  
Nor with impatience from the season asked  
More than its timely produce; rather loved  
The hours for what they are, than from regard  
Glanced on their promises in restless pride.  
Such was she — not from faculties more strong  
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,  
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace  
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,  
A heart that found benignity and hope,  
Being itself benign.

My drift I fear  
Is scarcely obvious; but, that common sense  
May try this modern system by its fruits,  
Leave let me take to place before her sight  
A specimen pourtrayed with faithful hand.  
Full early trained to worship seemliness,  
This model of a child is never known  
To mix in quarrels; that were far beneath  
Its dignity; with gifts he bubbles o'er  
As generous as a fountain; selfishness  
May not come near him, nor the little throng

## BOOKS

Of flitting pleasures tempt him from his path;  
The wandering beggars propagate his name,  
Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun,  
And natural or supernatural fear,  
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,  
Touches him not. To enhance the wonder, see  
How arch his notices, how nice his sense  
Of the ridiculous; not blind is he  
To the broad follies of the licensed world,  
Yet innocent himself withal, though shrewd,  
And can read lectures upon innocence;  
A miracle of scientific lore,  
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,  
And tell you all their cunning; he can read  
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;  
He knows the policies of foreign lands;  
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,  
The whole world over, tight as beads of dew  
Upon a gossamer thread; he sits, he weighs;  
All things are put to question; he must live  
Knowing that he grows wiser every day  
Or else not live at all, and seeing too  
Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:  
For this unnatural growth the trainer blame,  
Pity the tree. — Poor human vanity,

## THE PRELUDE

Wert thou extinguished, little would be left  
Which he could truly love; but how escape?  
For, ever as a thought of purer birth  
Rises to lead him toward a better clime,  
Some intermeddler still is on the watch  
To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray,  
Within the pinfold of his own conceit.  
Meanwhile old grandame earth is grieved to find  
The playthings, which her love designed for him,  
Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers  
Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn.  
Oh! give us once again the wishing-cap  
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat  
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,  
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!  
The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap  
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.

These mighty workmen of our later age,  
Who, with a broad highway, have over-bridged  
The froward chaos of futurity,  
Tamed to their bidding; they who have the skill  
To manage books, and things, and make them act  
On infant minds as surely as the sun  
Deals with a flower; the keepers of our time,  
The guides and wardens of our faculties,

## BOOKS

Sages who in their prescience would control  
All accidents, and to the very road  
Which they have fashioned would confine us down,  
Like engines; when will their presumption learn,  
That in the unreasoning progress of the world  
A wiser spirit is at work for us,  
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal  
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,  
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours ?

<sup>5</sup>There was a Boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs  
And islands of Winander! — many a time  
At evening, when the earliest stars began  
To move along the edges of the hills,  
Rising or setting, would he stand alone  
Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,  
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands  
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth  
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,  
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,  
That they might answer him; and they would shout  
Across the watery vale, and shout again,  
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,  
And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud,  
Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild  
Of jocund din; and, when a lengthened pause

## THE PRELUDE

Of silence came and baffled his best skill,  
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung  
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise  
Has carried far into his heart the voice  
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene  
Would enter unawares into his mind,  
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,  
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received  
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This Boy was taken from his mates, and died  
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.  
Fair is the spot, most beautiful the vale  
Where he was born; the grassy churchyard hangs  
Upon a slope above the village school,  
And through that churchyard when my way has led  
On summer evenings, I believe that there  
A long half hour together I have stood  
Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies!  
Even now appears before the mind's clear eye  
That self-same village church; I see her sit  
(The thronèd Lady whom erewhile we hailed)  
On her green hill, forgetful of this Boy  
Who slumbers at her feet, — forgetful, too,  
Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves,  
And listening only to the gladsome sounds



## BOOKS

That, from the rural school ascending, play  
Beneath her and about her. May she long  
Behold a race of young ones like to those  
With whom I herded! — (easily, indeed,  
We might have fed upon a fatter soil  
Of arts and letters — but be that forgiven) —  
A race of real children; not too wise,  
Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh,  
And bandied up and down by love and hate;  
Not unresentful where self-justified;  
Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy;  
Mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds;  
Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft  
Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight  
Of pain, and doubt, and fear, yet yielding not  
In happiness to the happiest upon earth.  
Simplicity in habit, truth in speech,  
Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds;  
May books and Nature be their early joy!  
And knowledge, rightly honoured with that name —  
Knowledge not purchased by the loss of power!

Well do I call to mind the very week  
When I was first intrusted to the care  
Of that sweet Valley; when its paths, its shores,  
And brooks were like a dream of novelty

## THE PRELUDE

To my half-infant thoughts; that very week,  
While I was roving up and down alone,  
Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross  
One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,  
Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake:  
Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom  
Appeared distinctly on the opposite shore  
A heap of garments, as if left by one  
Who might have there been bathing. Long I watched,  
But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake  
Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,  
And, now and then, a fish up-leaping snapped  
The breathless stillness. The succeeding day,  
Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale  
Drew to the spot an anxious crowd; some looked  
In passive expectation from the shore,  
While from a boat others hung o'er the deep,  
Sounding with grappling irons and long poles.  
At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene  
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright  
Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape  
Of terror; yet no soul-debasing fear,  
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,  
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen  
Such sights before, among the shining streams  
Of faery land, the forest of romance.

## BOOKS

Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle  
With decoration of ideal grace;  
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works  
Of Grecian art, and purest poesy.

A precious treasure had I long possessed,  
A little yellow, canvas-covered book,  
A slender abstract of the Arabian tales;  
And, from companions in a new abode,  
When first I learnt that this dear prize of mine  
Was but a block hewn from a mighty quarry —  
That there were four large volumes, laden all  
With kindred matter, 't was to me, in truth,  
A promise scarcely earthly. Instantly,  
With one not richer than myself, I made  
A covenant that each should lay aside  
The moneys he possessed, and hoard up more  
Till our joint savings had amassed enough  
To make this book our own. Through several months,  
In spite of all temptation, we preserved  
Religiously that vow; but firmness failed,  
Nor were we ever masters of our wish.

And when thereafter to my father's house  
The holidays returned me, there to find  
That golden store of books which I had left,

## THE PRELUDE

What joy was mine! How often in the course  
Of those glad respites, though a soft west wind  
Ruffled the waters to the angler's wish,  
For a whole day together, have I lain  
Down by thy side, O Derwent! murmuring stream,  
On the hot stones, and in the glaring sun,  
And there have read, devouring as I read,  
Defrauding the day's glory, desperate!  
Till with a sudden bound of smart reproach,  
Such as an idler deals with in his shame,  
I to the sport betook myself again.

A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,  
And o'er the heart of man; invisibly  
It comes, to works of unreprieved delight,  
And tendency benign, directing those  
Who care not, know not, think not, what they do.  
The tales that charm away the wakeful night  
In Araby; romances; legends penned  
For solace by dim light of monkish lamps;  
Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised  
By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun  
By the dismantled warrior in old age,  
Out of the bowels of those very schemes  
In which his youth did first extravagate;  
These spread like day, and something in the shape

## BOOKS

Of these will live till man shall be no more.  
Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,  
And *they must* have their food. Our childhood sits,  
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne  
That hath more power than all the elements.  
I guess not what this tells of Being past,  
Nor what it augurs of the life to come;  
But so it is; and, in that dubious hour —  
That twilight — when we first begin to see  
This dawning earth, to recognise, expect,  
And, in the long probation that ensues,  
The time of trial, ere we learn to live  
In reconcilment with our stinted powers;  
To endure this state of meagre vassalage,  
Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,  
Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows  
To custom, mettlesome, and not yet tamed  
And humbled down — oh! then we feel, we feel,  
We know where we have friends. Ye dreamers, then,  
Forgers of daring tales! we bless you then,  
Impostors, drivellers, dotards, as the ape  
Philosophy will call you: *then* we feel  
With what, and how great might ye are in league,  
Who make our wish, our power, our thought a deed,  
An empire, a possession, — ye whom time  
And seasons serve; all Faculties to whom

## THE PRELUDE

Earth crouches, the elements are potter's clay,  
Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,  
Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.

Relinquishing this lofty eminence  
For ground, though humbler, not the less a tract  
Of the same isthmus, which our spirits cross  
In progress from their native continent  
To earth and human life, the Song might dwell  
On that delightful time of growing youth,  
When craving for the marvellous gives way  
To strengthening love for things that we have seen;  
When sober truth and steady sympathies,  
Offered to notice by less daring pens,  
Take firmer hold of us, and words themselves  
Move us with conscious pleasure.

I am sad

At thought of rapture now for ever flown;  
Almost to tears I sometimes could be sad  
To think of, to read over, many a page,  
Poems withal of name, which at that time  
Did never fail to entrance me, and are now  
Dead in my eyes, dead as a theatre  
Fresh emptied of spectators. Twice five years  
Or less I might have seen, when first my mind  
With conscious pleasure opened to the charm





*Esthwaite Water*







## BOOKS

Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet  
For their own *sakes*, a passion, and a power;  
And phrases pleased me chosen for delight,  
For pomp, or love. Oft, in the public roads  
Yet unfrequented, while the morning light  
Was yellowing the hill tops, I went abroad  
With a dear friend, and for the better part  
Of two delightful hours we strolled along  
By the still borders of the misty lake,  
Repeating favourite verses with one voice,  
Or conning more, as happy as the birds  
That round us chaunted. Well might we be glad,  
Lifted above the ground by airy fancies,  
More bright than madness or the dreams of wine;  
And, though full oft the objects of our love  
Were false, and in their splendour overwrought,  
Yet was there surely then no vulgar power  
Working within us, — nothing less, in truth,  
Than that most noble attribute of man,  
Though yet untutored and inordinate,  
That wish for something loftier, more adorned,  
Than is the common aspect, daily garb,  
Of human life. What wonder, then, if sounds  
Of exultation echoed through the groves!  
For, images, and sentiments, and words,  
And everything encountered or pursued

## THE PRELUDE

In that delicious world of poesy,  
Kept holiday, a never-ending show,  
With music, incense, festival, and flowers!

Here must we pause: this only let me add,  
From heart-experience, and in humblest sense  
Of modesty, that he, who in his youth  
A daily wanderer among woods and fields  
With living Nature hath been intimate,  
Not only in that raw unpractised time  
Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,  
By glittering verse; but further, doth receive,  
In measure only dealt out to himself,  
Knowledge and increase of enduring joy  
From the great Nature that exists in works  
Of mighty Poets. Visionary power  
Attends the motions of the viewless winds,  
Embodied in the mystery of words:  
There, darkness makes abode, and all the host  
Of shadowy things work endless changes, — there,  
As in a mansion like their proper home,  
Even forms and substances are circumfused  
By that transparent veil with light divine,  
And, through the turnings intricate of verse,  
Present themselves as objects recognised,  
In flashes, and with glory not their own.



# CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

## BOOK SIXTH

### CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

THE leaves were fading when to Esthwaite's banks  
And the simplicities of cottage life  
I bade farewell; and, one among the youth  
Who, summoned by that season, reunite  
As scattered birds troop to the fowler's lure,  
Went back to Granta's cloisters, not so prompt  
Or eager, though as gay and undepressed  
In mind, as when I thence had taken flight  
A few short months before. I turned my face  
Without repining from the coves and heights  
Clothed in the sunshine of the withering fern;  
Quitted, not loth, the mild magnificence  
Of calmer lakes and louder streams; and you,  
Frank-hearted maids of rocky Cumberland,  
You and your not unwelcome days of mirth,  
Relinquished, and your nights of revelry,  
And in my own unlovely cell sate down  
In lightsome mood — such privilege has youth  
That cannot take long leave of pleasant thoughts.

The bonds of indolent society  
Relaxing in their hold, henceforth I lived  
More to myself. Two winters may be passed

## THE PRELUDE

Without a separate notice: many books  
Were skimmed, devoured, or studiously perused,  
But with no settled plan. I was detached  
Internally from academic cares;  
Yet independent study seemed a course  
Of hardy disobedience toward friends  
And kindred, proud rebellion and unkind.  
This spurious virtue, rather let it bear  
A name it now deserves, this cowardice,  
Gave treacherous sanction to that over-love  
Of freedom which encouraged me to turn  
From regulations even of my own  
As from restraints and bonds. Yet who can tell —  
Who knows what thus may have been gained, both then  
And at a later season, or preserved;  
What love of nature, what original strength  
Of contemplation, what intuitive truths  
The deepest and the best, what keen research,  
Unbiassed, unbewildered, and unawed?

The Poet's soul was with me at that time;  
Sweet meditations, the still overflow  
Of present happiness, while future years  
Lacked not anticipations, tender dreams,  
No few of which have since been realised;  
And some remain, hopes for my future life.

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Four years and thirty, told this very week,  
Have I been now a sojourner on earth,  
By sorrow not unsmitten; yet for me  
Life's morning radiance hath not left the hills,  
Her dew is on the flowers. Those were the days  
Which also first emboldened me to trust  
With firmness, hitherto but slightly touched  
By such a daring thought, that I might leave  
Some monument behind me which pure hearts  
Should reverence. The instinctive humbleness,  
Maintained even by the very name and thought  
Of printed books and authorship, began  
To melt away; and further, the dread awe  
Of mighty names was softened down and seemed  
Approachable, admitting fellowship  
Of modest sympathy. Such aspect now,  
Though not familiarly, my mind put on,  
Content to observe, to achieve, and to enjoy.

All winter long, whenever free to choose,  
Did I by night frequent the College grove  
And tributary walks; the last, and oft  
The only one, who had been lingering there  
Through hours of silence, till the porter's bell,  
A punctual follower on the stroke of nine,  
Rang with its blunt unceremonious voice;

## THE PRELUDE

Inexorable summons! Lofty elms,  
Inviting shades of opportune recess,  
Bestowed composure on a neighbourhood  
Unpeaceful in itself. A single tree  
With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreathed,  
Grew there; an ash which Winter for himself  
Decked out with pride, and with outlandish grace:  
Up from the ground, and almost to the top,  
'The trunk and every master branch were green  
With clustering ivy, and the lightsome twigs  
And outer spray profusely tipped with seeds  
That hung in yellow tassels, while the air  
Stirred them, not voiceless. Often have I stood  
Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree  
Beneath a frosty moon. The hemisphere  
Of magic fiction, verse of mine perchance  
May never tread; but scarcely Spenser's self  
Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,  
Or could more bright appearances create  
Of human forms with superhuman powers,  
Than I beheld, loitering on calm clear nights  
Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth.

On the vague reading of a truant youth  
'T were idle to descant. My inner judgment  
Not seldom differed from my taste in books,

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

As if it appertained to another mind,  
And yet the books which then I valued most  
Are dearest to me *now*: for, having scanned,  
Not heedlessly, the laws, and watched the forms  
Of Nature, in that knowledge I possessed  
A standard, often usefully applied,  
Even when unconsciously, to things removed  
From a familiar sympathy. — In fine,  
I was a better judge of thoughts than words,  
Misled in estimating words, not only  
By common inexperience of youth,  
But by the trade in classic niceties,  
The dangerous craft, of culling term and phrase  
From languages that want the living voice  
To carry meaning to the natural heart;  
To tell us what is passion, what is truth,  
What reason, what simplicity and sense.

Yet may we not entirely overlook  
The pleasure gathered from the rudiments  
Of geometric science. Though advanced  
In these enquiries, with regret I speak,  
No farther than the threshold, there I found  
Both elevation and composed delight:  
With Indian awe and wonder, ignorance pleased  
With its own struggles, did I meditate

## THE PRELUDE

On the relation those abstractions bear  
To Nature's laws, and by what process led,  
Those immaterial agents bowed their heads  
Duly to serve the mind of earth-born man;  
From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere,  
From system on to system without end.

More frequently from the same source I drew  
A pleasure quiet and profound, a sense  
Of permanent and universal sway,  
And paramount belief; there, recognised  
A type, for finite natures, of the one  
Supreme Existence, the surpassing life  
Which — to the boundaries of space and time,  
Of melancholy space and doleful time,  
Superior and incapable of change,  
Nor touched by welterings of passion — is,  
And hath the name of, God. Transcendent peace  
And silence did await upon these thoughts  
That were a frequent comfort to my youth.

'T is told by one whom stormy waters threw,  
With fellow-sufferers by the shipwreck spared,  
Upon a desert coast, that having brought  
To land a single volume, saved by chance,  
A treatise of Geometry, he went,



## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Although of food and clothing destitute,  
And beyond common wretchedness depressed,  
To part from company and take this book  
(Then first a self-taught pupil in its truths)  
To spots remote, and draw his diagrams  
With a long staff upon the sand, and thus  
Did oft beguile his sorrow, and almost  
Forget his feeling: so (if like effect  
From the same cause produced, 'mid outward things  
So different, may rightly be compared),  
So was it then with me, and so will be  
With poets ever. Mighty is the charm  
Of those abstractions to a mind beset  
With images and haunted by herself,  
And specially delightful unto me  
Was that clear synthesis built up aloft  
So gracefully; even then when it appeared  
Not more than a mere plaything, or a toy  
To sense embodied: not the thing it is  
In verity, an independent world,  
Created out of pure intelligence.

Such dispositions then were mine unearned  
By aught, I fear, of genuine desert —  
Mine, through heaven's grace and inborn aptitudes.  
And not to leave the story of that time

## THE PRELUDE

Imperfect, with these habits must be joined,  
Moods melancholy, fits of spleen, that loved  
A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds,  
The twilight more than dawn, autumn than  
spring;

A treasured and luxurious gloom of choice  
And inclination mainly, and the mere  
Redundancy of youth's contentedness.  
— To time thus spent, add multitudes of hours  
Pilfered away, by what the Bard who sang  
Of the Enchanter Indolence hath called  
“Good-natured lounging,” and behold a map  
Of my collegiate life — far less intense  
Than duty called for, or, without regard  
To duty, *might* have sprung up of itself  
By change of accidents, or even, to speak  
Without unkindness, in another place.  
Yet why take refuge in that plea? — the fault,  
This I repeat, was mine; mine be the blame.

In summer, making quest for works of art,  
Or scenes renowned for beauty, I explored  
That streamlet whose blue current works its way  
Between romantic Dovedale's spiry rocks;  
Pried into Yorkshire dales, or hidden tracts  
Of my own native region, and was blest

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Between these sundry wanderings with a joy  
Above all joys, that seemed another morn  
Risen on mid noon; blest with the presence, Friend,  
Of that sole Sister, her who hath been long  
Dear to thee also, thy true friend and mine,  
Now, after separation desolate,  
Restored to me — such absence that she seemed  
A gift then first bestowed. The varied banks  
Of Emont, hitherto unnamed in song,  
And that monastic castle, 'mid tall trees,  
Low standing by the margin of the stream,  
A mansion visited (as fame reports)  
By Sidney, where, in sight of our Helvellyn,  
Or stormy Cross-fell, snatches he might pen  
Of his Arcadia, by fraternal love  
Inspired; — that river and those mouldering towers  
Have seen us side by side, when, having clomb  
The darksome windings of a broken stair,  
And crept along a ridge of fractured wall,  
Not without trembling, we in safety looked  
Forth, through some Gothic window's open space,  
And gathered with one mind a rich reward  
From the far-stretching landscape, by the light  
Of morning beautified, or purple eve;  
Or, not less pleased, lay on some turret's head,  
Catching from tufts of grass and hare-bell flowers

## THE PRELUDE

Their faintest whisper to the passing breeze,  
Given out while mid-day heat oppressed the plains.

Another maid there was, who also shed  
A gladness o'er that season, then to me,  
By her exulting outside look of youth  
And placid under-countenance, first endeared;  
That other spirit, Coleridge! who is now  
So near to us, that meek confiding heart,  
So revered by us both. O'er paths and fields  
In all that neighbourhood, through narrow lanes  
Of eglantine, and through the shady woods,  
And o'er the Border Beacon, and the waste  
Of naked pools, and common crags that lay  
Exposed on the bare fell, were scattered love,  
The spirit of pleasure, and youth's golden gleam.  
O Friend! we had not seen thee at that time,  
And yet a power is on me, and a strong  
Confusion, and I seem to plant thee there.  
Far art thou wandered now in search of health  
And milder breezes, — melancholy lot!  
But thou art with us, with us in the past,  
The present, with us in the times to come.  
There is no grief, no sorrow, no despair,  
No languor, no dejection, no dismay,  
No absence scarcely can there be, for those

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Who love as we do. Speed thee well! divide  
With us thy pleasure; thy returning strength,  
Receive it daily as a joy of ours;  
Share with us thy fresh spirits, whether gift  
Of gales Etesian or of tender thoughts.

I, too, have been a wanderer; but, alas!  
How different the fate of different men.  
Though mutually unknown, yea nursed and reared  
As if in several elements, we were framed  
To bend at last to the same discipline,  
Predestined, if two beings ever were,  
To seek the same delights, and have one health,  
One happiness. Throughout this narrative,  
Else sooner ended, I have borne in mind  
For whom it registers the birth, and marks the growth  
Of gentleness, simplicity, and truth,  
And joyous loves, that hallow innocent days  
Of peace and self-command. Of rivers, fields,  
And groves I speak to thee, my Friend! to thee,  
Who, yet a liveried schoolboy, in the depths  
Of the huge city, on the leaded roof  
Of that wide edifice, thy school and home,  
Wert used to lie and gaze upon the clouds  
Moving in heaven; or, of that pleasure tired,  
To shut thine eyes, and by internal light

## THE PRELUDE

See trees, and meadows, and thy native stream,  
Far distant, thus beheld from year to year  
Of a long exile. Nor could I forget,  
In this late portion of my argument,  
That scarcely, as my term of pupilage  
Ceased, had I left those academic bowers  
When thou wert thither guided. From the heart  
Of London, and from cloisters there, thou camest,  
And didst sit down in temperance and peace,  
A rigorous student. What a stormy course  
Then followed. Oh! it is a pang that calls  
For utterance, to think what easy change  
Of circumstances might to thee have spared  
A world of pain, ripened a thousand hopes,  
For ever withered. Through this retrospect  
Of my collegiate life I still have had  
Thy after-sojourn in the self-same place  
Present before my eyes, have played with times  
And accidents as children do with cards,  
Or as a man, who, when his house is built,  
A frame locked up in wood and stone, doth still,  
As impotent fancy prompts, by his fireside,  
Rebuild it to his liking. I had thought  
Of thee, thy learning, gorgeous eloquence,  
And all the strength and plumage of thy youth,  
Thy subtle speculations, toils abstruse



## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms  
Of wild ideal pageantry, shaped out  
From things well-matched or ill, and words for  
things,  
The self-created sustenance of a mind  
Debarred from Nature's living images,  
Compelled to be a life unto herself,  
And unrelentingly possessed by thirst  
Of greatness, love, and beauty. Not alone,  
Ah! surely not in singleness of heart  
Should I have seen the light of evening fade  
From smooth Cam's silent waters: had we met,  
Even at that early time, needs must I trust  
In the belief, that my maturer age,  
My calmer habits, and more steady voice,  
Would with an influence benign have soothed,  
Or chased away, the airy wretchedness  
That battered on thy youth. But thou hast trod  
A march of glory, which doth put to shame  
These vain regrets; health suffers in thee, else  
Such grief for thee would be the weakest thought  
That ever harboured in the breast of man.

A passing word erewhile did lightly touch  
On wanderings of my own, that now embraced  
With livelier hope a region wider far.

## THE PRELUDE

When the third summer freed us from restraint,  
A youthful friend, he too a mountaineer,  
Not slow to share my wishes, took his staff,  
And sallying forth, we journeyed side by side,  
Bound to the distant Alps. A hardy slight,  
Did this unprecedented course imply,  
Of college studies and their set rewards;  
Nor had, in truth, the scheme been formed by me  
Without uneasy forethought of the pain,  
The censures, and ill-omening, of those  
To whom my worldly interests were dear.  
But Nature then was sovereign in my mind,  
And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,  
Had given a charter to irregular hopes.  
In any age of uneventful calm  
Among the nations, surely would my heart  
Have been possessed by similar desire;  
But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,  
France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again.

Lightly equipped, and but a few brief looks  
Cast on the white cliffs of our native shore  
From the receding vessel's deck, we chanced  
To land at Calais on the very eve  
Of that great federal day; and there we saw,

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

In a mean city, and among a few,  
How bright a face is worn when joy of one  
Is joy for tens of millions. Southward thence  
We held our way, direct through hamlets, towns,  
Gaudy with reliques of that festival,  
Flowers left to wither on triumphal arcs,  
And window-garlands. On the public roads,  
And, once, three days successively, through paths  
By which our toilsome journey was abridged,  
Among sequestered villages we walked  
And found benevolence and blessedness  
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, when spring  
Hath left no corner of the land untouched;  
Where elms for many and many a league in files  
With their thin umbrage, on the stately roads  
Of that great kingdom, rustled o'er our heads,  
For ever near us as we paced along:  
How sweet at such a time, with such delight  
On every side, in prime of youthful strength,  
To feed a Poet's tender melancholy  
And fond conceit of sadness, with the sound  
Of undulations varying as might please  
The wind that swayed them; once, and more than once,  
Unhoused beneath the evening star we saw  
Dances of liberty, and, in late hours  
Of darkness, dances in the open air

## THE PRELUDE

Deftly prolonged, though grey-haired lookers on  
Might waste their breath in chiding.

Under hills —

The vine-clad hills and slopes of Burgundy,  
Upon the bosom of the gentle Saone  
We glided forward with the flowing stream.  
Swift Rhone! thou wert the *wings* on which we cut  
A winding passage with majestic ease  
Between thy lofty rocks. Enchanting show  
Those woods and farms and orchards did present,  
And single cottages and lurking towns,  
Reach after reach, succession without end  
Of deep and stately vales! A lonely pair  
Of strangers, till day closed, we sailed along  
Clustered together with a merry crowd  
Of those emancipated, a blithe host  
Of travellers, chiefly delegates, returning  
From the great spousals newly solemnised  
At their chief city, in the sight of Heaven.  
Like bees they swarmed, gaudy and gay as bees;  
Some vapoured in the unruliness of joy,  
And with their swords flourished as if to fight  
The saucy air. In this proud company  
We landed — took with them our evening meal,  
Guests welcome almost as the angels were  
To Abraham of old. The supper done,

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

With flowing cups elate and happy thoughts  
We rose at signal given, and formed a ring  
And, hand in hand, danced round and round the board;  
All hearts were open, every tongue was loud  
With amity and glee; we bore a name  
Honoured in France, the name of Englishmen,  
And hospitably did they give us hail,  
As their forerunners in a glorious course;  
And round and round the board we danced again.  
With these blithe friends our voyage we renewed  
At early dawn. The monastery bells  
Made a sweet jingling in our youthful ears;  
The rapid river flowing without noise,  
And each uprising or receding spire  
Spoke with a sense of peace, at intervals  
Touching the heart amid the boisterous crew  
By whom we were encompassed. Taking leave  
Of this glad throng, foot-travellers side by side,  
Measuring our steps in quiet, we pursued  
Our journey, and ere twice the sun had set  
Beheld the Convent of Chartreuse, and there  
Rested within an awful *solitude* :  
Yes; for even then no other than a place  
Of soul-affecting *solitude* appeared  
That far-famed region, though our eyes had seen,  
As toward the sacred mansion we advanced,

## THE PRELUDE

Arms flashing, and a military glare  
Of riotous men commissioned to expel  
The blameless inmates, and belike subvert  
That frame of social being, which so long  
Had bodied forth the ghostliness of things  
In silence visible and perpetual calm.  
— “Stay, stay your sacrilegious hands!” — The voice  
Was Nature’s, uttered from her Alpine throne;  
I heard it then and seem to hear it now —  
“Your impious work forbear, perish what may,  
Let this one temple last, be this one spot  
Of earth devoted to eternity!”  
She ceased to speak, but while St. Bruno’s pines  
Waved their dark tops, not silent as they waved,  
And while below, along their several beds,  
Murmured the sister streams of Life and Death,  
Thus by conflicting passions pressed, my heart  
Responded: “Honour to the patriot’s zeal!  
Glory and hope to new-born Liberty!  
Hail to the mighty projects of the time!  
Discerning sword that Justice wields, do thou  
Go forth and prosper; and, ye purging fires,  
Up to the loftiest towers of Pride ascend,  
Fanned by the breath of angry Providence.  
But oh! if Past and Future be the wings  
On whose support harmoniously conjoined



## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Moves the great spirit of human knowledge, spare  
These courts of mystery, where a step advanced  
Between the portals of the shadowy rocks  
Leaves far behind life's treacherous vanities,  
For penitential tears and trembling hopes  
Exchanged — to equalise in God's pure sight  
Monarch and peasant: be the house redeemed  
With its unworldly votaries, for the sake  
Of conquest over sense, hourly achieved  
Through faith and meditative reason, resting  
Upon the word of heaven-imparted truth,  
Calmly triumphant; and for humbler claim  
Of that imaginative impulse sent  
From these majestic floods, yon shining cliffs,  
The untransmuted shapes of many worlds,  
Cerulean ether's pure inhabitants,  
These forests unapproachable by death,  
That shall endure as long as man endures,  
To think, to hope, to worship, and to feel,  
To struggle, to be lost within himself  
In trepidation, from the blank abyss  
To look with bodily eyes, and be consoled."  
Not seldom since that moment have I wished  
That thou, O Friend! the trouble or the calm  
Hadst shared, when, from profane regards apart,  
In sympathetic reverence we trod

## THE PRELUDE

The floors of those dim cloisters, till that hour,  
From their foundation, strangers to the presence  
Of unrestricted and unthinking man.  
Abroad, how cheeringly the sunshine lay  
Upon the open lawns! Vallombre's groves  
Entering, we fed the soul with darkness; thence  
Issued, and with uplifted eyes beheld,  
In different quarters of the bending sky,  
The cross of Jesus stand erect, as if  
Hands of angelic powers had fixed it there,  
Memorial revered by a thousand storms;  
Yet then, from the indiscriminating sweep  
And rage of one State-whirlwind, insecure.

'T is not my present purpose to retrace  
That variegated journey step by step.  
A march it was of military speed,  
And Earth did change her images and forms  
Before us, fast as clouds are changed in heaven.  
Day after day, up early and down late,  
From hill to vale we dropped, from vale to hill  
Mounted — from province on to province swept,  
Keen hunters in a chase of fourteen weeks,  
Eager as birds of prey, or as a ship  
Upon the stretch, when winds are blowing fair:  
Sweet coverts did we cross of pastoral life,

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Enticing valleys, greeted them and left  
Too soon, while yet the very flash and gleam  
Of salutation were not passed away.  
Oh! sorrow for the youth who could have seen,  
Unchastened, unsubdued, unawed, unraised  
To patriarchal dignity of mind,  
And pure simplicity of wish and will,  
Those sanctified abodes of peaceful man,  
Pleased (though to hardship born, and compassed  
    round  
With danger, varying as the seasons change),  
Pleased with his daily task, or, if not pleased,  
Contented, from the moment that the dawn  
(Ah! surely not without attendant gleams  
Of soul-illumination) calls him forth  
To industry, by glistenings flung on rocks,  
Whose evening shadows lead him to repose.

Well might a stranger look with bounding  
    heart

Down on a green recess, the first I saw  
Of those deep haunts, an aboriginal vale,  
Quiet and lorded over and possessed  
By naked huts, wood-built, and sown like tents  
Or Indian cabins over the fresh lawns  
And by the river side.

## THE PRELUDE

That very day,  
From a bare ridge we also first beheld  
Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved  
To have a soulless image on the eye  
That had usurped upon a living thought  
That never more could be. The wondrous Vale  
Of Chamouny stretched far below, and soon  
With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice,  
A motionless array of mighty waves,  
Five rivers broad and vast, made rich amends,  
And reconciled us to realities;  
There small birds warble from the leafy trees,  
The eagle soars high in the element,  
There doth the reaper bind the yellow sheaf,  
The maiden spread the haycock in the sun,  
While Winter like a well-tamed lion walks,  
Descending from the mountain to make sport  
Among the cottages by beds of flowers.

Whate'er in this wide circuit we beheld,  
Or heard, was fitted to our unripe state  
Of intellect and heart. With such a book  
Before our eyes, we could not choose but read  
Lessons of genuine brotherhood, the plain  
And universal reason of mankind,  
The truths of young and old. Nor, side by side

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Pacing, two social pilgrims, or alone  
Each with his humour, could we fail to abound  
In dreams and fictions, pensively composed:  
Dejection taken up for pleasure's sake,  
And gilded sympathies, the willow wreath,  
And sober posies of funereal flowers,  
Gathered among those solitudes sublime  
From formal gardens of the lady Sorrow,  
Did sweeten many a meditative hour.

Yet still in me with those soft luxuries  
Mixed something of stern mood, an underthirst  
Of vigour seldom utterly allayed:  
And from that source how different a sadness  
Would issue, let one incident make known.  
When from the Vallais we had turned, and clomb  
Along the Simplon's steep and rugged road,  
Following a band of muleteers, we reached  
A halting-place, where all together took  
Their noon-tide meal. Hastily rose our guide,  
Leaving us at the board; awhile we lingered,  
Then paced the beaten downward way that led  
Right to a rough stream's edge, and there broke off;  
The only track now visible was one  
That from the torrent's further brink held forth  
Conspicuous invitation to ascend

## THE PRELUDE

A lofty mountain. After brief delay  
Crossing the unbridged stream, that road we took,  
And clomb with eagerness, till anxious fears  
Intruded, for we failed to overtake  
Our comrades gone before. By fortunate chance,  
While every moment added doubt to doubt,  
A peasant met us, from whose mouth we learned  
That to the spot which had perplexed us first  
We must descend, and there should find the road,  
Which in the stony channel of the stream  
Lay a few steps, and then along its banks;  
And, that our future course, all plain to sight,  
Was downwards, with the current of that stream.  
Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,  
For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,  
We questioned him again, and yet again;  
But every word that from the peasant's lips  
Came in reply, translated by our feelings,  
Ended in this, — *that we had crossed the Alps.*

Imagination — here the Power so called  
Through sad incompetence of human speech,  
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss  
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,  
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;  
Halted without an effort to break through;



## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

But to my conscious soul I now can say —  
‘I recognise thy glory’: in such strength  
Of usurpation, when the light of sense  
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
There harbours; whether we be young or old,  
Our destiny, our being’s heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be.  
Under such banners militant, the soul  
Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils  
That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts  
That are their own perfection and reward,  
Strong in herself and in beatitude  
That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile  
Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds  
To fertilise the whole Egyptian plain.

The melancholy slackening that ensued  
Upon those tidings by the peasant given  
Was soon dislodged. Downwards we hurried fast,  
And, with the half-shaped road which we had  
missed,  
Entered a narrow chasm. The brook and road<sup>6</sup>

## THE PRELUDE

Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy strait,  
And with them did we journey several hours  
At a slow pace. The immeasurable height  
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,  
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,  
And in the narrow rent at every turn  
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,  
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,  
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side  
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight  
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,  
The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,  
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light —  
Were all like workings of one mind, the features  
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;  
Characters of the great Apocalypse,  
The types and symbols of Eternity,  
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

That night our lodging was a house that stood  
Alone within the valley, at a point  
Where, tumbling from aloft, a torrent swelled  
The rapid stream whose margin we had trod;  
A dreary mansion, large beyond all need,  
With high and spacious rooms, deafened and stunned

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

By noise of waters, making innocent sleep  
Lie melancholy among weary bones.

Uprisen betimes, our journey we renewed,  
Led by the stream, ere noon-day magnified  
Into a lordly river, broad and deep,  
Dimpling along in silent majesty,  
With mountains for its neighbours, and in view  
Of distant mountains and their snowy tops,  
And thus proceeding to Locarno's Lake,  
Fit resting-place for such a visitant.  
Locarno! spreading out in width like Heaven,  
How dost thou cleave to the poetic heart,  
Bask in the sunshine of the memory;  
And Como! thou, a treasure whom the earth  
Keeps to herself, confined as in a depth  
Of Abyssinian privacy. I spake  
Of thee, thy chestnut woods, and garden plots  
Of Indian corn tended by dark-eyed maids;  
Thy lofty steeps, and pathways roofed with vines,  
Winding from house to house, from town to town,  
Sole link that binds them to each other; walks,  
League after league, and cloistral avenues,  
Where silence dwells if music be not there:  
While yet a youth undisciplined in verse,  
Through fond ambition of that hour I strove

## THE PRELUDE

To chant your praise; nor can approach you now  
Ungreeted by a more melodious Song,  
Where tones of Nature smoothed by learned Art  
May flow in lasting current. Like a breeze  
Or sunbeam over your domain I passed  
In motion without pause; but ye have left  
Your beauty with me, a serene accord  
Of forms and colours, passive, yet endowed  
In their submissiveness with power as sweet  
And gracious, almost, might I dare to say,  
As virtue is, or goodness; sweet as love,  
Or the remembrance of a generous deed,  
Or mildest visitations of pure thought,  
When God, the giver of all joy, is thanked  
Religiously, in silent blessedness;  
Sweet as this last herself, for such it is.

With those delightful pathways we advanced,  
For two days' space, in presence of the Lake,  
That, stretching far among the Alps, assumed  
A character more stern. The second night,  
From sleep awakened, and misled by sound  
Of the church clock telling the hours with strokes  
Whose import then we had not learned, we rose  
By moonlight, doubting not that day was nigh,  
And that meanwhile, by no uncertain path,

## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

Along the winding margin of the lake,  
Led, as before, we should behold the scene  
Hushed in profound repose. We left the town  
Of Gravedona with this hope; but soon  
Were lost, bewildered among woods immense,  
And on a rock sate down, to wait for day.  
An open place it was, and overlooked,  
From high, the sullen water far beneath,  
On which a dull red image of the moon  
Lay bedded, changing oftentimes its form  
Like an uneasy snake. From hour to hour  
We sate and sate, wondering, as if the night  
Had been ensnared by witchcraft. On the rock  
At last we stretched our weary limbs for sleep,  
But *could not* sleep, tormented by the stings  
Of insects, which, with noise like that of noon,  
Filled all the woods: the cry of unknown birds;  
The mountains more by blackness visible  
And their own size, than any outward light;  
The breathless wilderness of clouds; the clock  
That told, with unintelligible voice,  
The widely parted hours; the noise of streams,  
And sometimes rustling motions nigh at hand,  
That did not leave us free from personal fear;  
And, lastly, the withdrawing moon, that set  
Before us, while she still was high in heaven; —

## THE PRELUDE

These were our food; and such a summer's night  
Followed that pair of golden days that shed  
On Como's Lake, and all that round it lay,  
Their fairest, softest, happiest influence.

But here I must break off, and bid farewell  
To days, each offering some new sight, or fraught  
With some untried adventure, in a course  
Prolonged till sprinklings of autumnal snow  
Checked our unwearied steps. Let this alone  
Be mentioned as a parting word, that not  
In hollow exultation, dealing out  
Hyperboles of praise comparative;  
Not rich one moment to be poor for ever;  
Not prostrate, overborne, as if the mind  
Herself were nothing, a mere pensioner  
On outward forms — did we in presence stand  
Of that magnificent region. On the front  
Of this whole Song is written that my heart  
Must, in such Temple, needs have offered up  
A different worship. Finally, whate'er  
I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream  
That flowed into a kindred stream; a gale,  
Confederate with the current of the soul,  
To speed my voyage; every sound or sight,  
In its degree of power, administered



## CAMBRIDGE AND THE ALPS

To grandeur or to tenderness, — to the one  
Directly, but to tender thoughts by means  
Less often instantaneous in effect;  
Led me to these by paths that, in the main,  
Were more circuitous, but not less sure  
Duly to reach the point marked out by Heaven.

Oh, most belovèd Friend! a glorious time,  
A happy time that was; triumphant looks  
Were then the common language of all eyes;  
As if awaked from sleep, the Nations hailed  
Their great expectancy: the fife of war  
Was then a spirit-stirring sound indeed,  
A blackbird's whistle in a budding grove.  
We left the Swiss exulting in the fate  
Of their near neighbours; and, when shortening  
fast

Our pilgrimage, nor distant far from home,  
We crossed the Brabant armies on the fret  
For battle in the cause of Liberty.  
A stripling, scarcely of the household then  
Of social life, I looked upon these things  
As from a distance; heard, and saw, and felt,  
Was touched, but with no intimate concern;  
I seemed to move along them, as a bird  
Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues

## THE PRELUDE

Its sport, or feeds in its proper element;  
I wanted not that joy, I did not need  
Such help; the ever-living universe,  
Turn where I might, was opening out its glories,  
And the independent spirit of pure youth  
Called forth, at every season, new delights,  
Spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields.

# RESIDENCE IN LONDON

## BOOK SEVENTH

### RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Six changeful years have vanished since I first  
Poured out (saluted by that quickening breeze  
Which met me issuing from the City's<sup>7</sup> walls)  
A glad preamble to this Verse: I sang  
Aloud, with fervour irresistible  
Of short-lived transport, like a torrent bursting,  
From a black thunder-cloud, down Scafell's side  
To rush and disappear. But soon broke forth  
(So willed the Muse) a less impetuous stream,  
That flowed awhile with unabating strength,  
Then stopped for years; not audible again  
Before last primrose-time. Belovèd Friend!  
The assurance which then cheered some heavy thoughts  
On thy departure to a foreign land  
Has failed; too slowly moves the promised work.  
Through the whole summer have I been at rest,  
Partly from voluntary holiday,  
And part through outward hindrance. But I heard,  
After the hour of sunset yester-even,  
Sitting within doors between light and dark,  
A choir of redbreasts gathered somewhere near  
My threshold, — minstrels from the distant woods  
Sent in on Winter's service, to announce,

## THE PRELUDE

With preparation artful and benign,  
That the rough lord had left the surly North  
On his accustomed journey. The delight,  
Due to this timely notice, unawares  
Smote me, and, listening, I in whispers said,  
“Ye heartsome Choristers, ye and I will be  
Associates, and, unscared by blustering winds,  
Will chant together.” Thereafter, as the shades  
Of twilight deepened, going forth, I spied  
A glow-worm underneath a dusky plume  
Or canopy of yet unwithered fern,  
Clear-shining, like a hermit’s taper seen  
Through a thick forest. Silence touched me here  
No less than sound had done before; the child  
Of Summer, lingering, shining, by herself,  
The voiceless worm on the unfrequented hills,  
Seemed sent on the same errand with the choir  
Of Winter that had warbled at my door,  
And the whole year breathed tenderness and love.

The last night’s genial feeling overflowed  
Upon this morning, and my favourite grove,  
Tossing in sunshine its dark boughs aloft,  
As if to make the strong wind visible,  
Wakes in me agitations like its own,  
A spirit friendly to the Poet’s task,

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Which we will now resume with lively hope,  
Nor checked by aught of tamer argument  
That lies before us, needful to be told.

Returned from that excursion,<sup>8</sup> soon I bade  
Farewell for ever to the sheltered seats  
Of gownèd students, quitted hall and bower,  
And every comfort of that privileged ground,  
Well pleased to pitch a vagrant tent among  
The unfenced regions of society.

Yet, undetermined to what course of life  
I should adhere, and seeming to possess  
A little space of intermediate time  
At full command, to London first I turned,  
In no disturbance of excessive hope,  
By personal ambition unenslaved,  
Frugal as there was need, and, though self-willed,  
From dangerous passions free. Three years had flown  
Since I had felt in heart and soul the shock  
Of the huge town's first presence, and had paced  
Her endless streets, a transient visitant:  
Now, fixed amid that concourse of mankind  
Where Pleasure whirls about incessantly,  
And life and labour seem but one, I filled  
An idler's place; an idler well content

## THE PRELUDE

To have a house (what matter for a home?)  
That owned him; living cheerfully abroad  
With unchecked fancy ever on the stir,  
And all my young affections out of doors.

There was a time when whatsoe'er is feigned  
Of airy palaces, and gardens built  
By Genii of romance; or hath in grave  
Authentic history been set forth of Rome,  
Alcairo, Babylon, or Persepolis;  
Or given upon report by pilgrim friars,  
Of golden cities ten months' journey deep  
Among Tartarian wilds — fell short, far short,  
Of what my fond simplicity believed  
And thought of London — held me by a chain  
Less strong of wonder and obscure delight.  
Whether the bolt of childhood's Fancy shot  
For me beyond its ordinary mark,  
'T were vain to ask; but in our flock of boys  
Was One, a cripple from his birth, whom chance  
Summoned from school to London; fortunate  
And envied traveller! When the Boy returned,  
After short absence, curiously I scanned  
His mien and person, nor was free, in sooth,  
From disappointment, not to find some change  
In look and air, from that new region brought,



## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

As if from Fairy-land. Much I questioned him;  
And every word he uttered, on my ears  
Fell flatter than a cagèd parrot's note,  
That answers unexpectedly awry,  
And mocks the prompter's listening. Marvellous things  
Had vanity (quick Spirit that appears  
Almost as deeply seated and as strong  
In a Child's heart as fear itself) conceived  
For my enjoyment. Would that I could now  
Recall what then I pictured to myself,  
Of mitred Prelates, Lords in ermine clad,  
The King, and the King's Palace, and, not last,  
Nor least, Heaven bless him! the renowned Lord Mayor.  
Dreams not unlike to those which once begat  
A change of purpose in young Whittington,  
When he, a friendless and a drooping boy,  
Sate on a stone, and heard the bells speak out  
Articulate music. Above all, one thought  
Baffled my understanding: how men lived  
Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still  
Strangers, not knowing each the other's name.

Oh, wondrous power of words, by simple faith  
Licensed to take the meaning that we love!  
Vauxhall and Ranelagh! I then had heard  
Of your green groves, and wilderness of lamps

## THE PRELUDE

Dimming the stars, and fireworks magical  
And gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes,  
Floating in dance, or warbling high in air  
The songs of spirits! Nor had Fancy fed  
With less delight upon that other class  
Of marvels, broad-day wonders permanent:  
The River proudly bridged; the dizzy top  
And Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's; the tombs  
Of Westminster; the Giants of Guildhall;  
Bedlam, and those carved maniacs at the gates,  
Perpetually recumbent; Statues — man,  
And the horse under him — in gilded pomp  
Adorning flowery gardens, 'mid vast squares;  
The Monument, and that Chamber of the Tower  
Where England's sovereigns sit in long array,  
Their steeds bestriding, — every mimic shape  
Cased in the gleaming mail the monarch wore,  
Whether for gorgeous tournament addressed,  
Or life or death upon the battle-field.  
Those bold imaginations in due time  
Had vanished, leaving others in their stead:  
And now I looked upon the living scene;  
Familiarly perused it; oftentimes,  
In spite of strongest disappointment, pleased  
Through courteous self-submission, as a tax  
Paid to the object by prescriptive right.

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain  
Of a too busy world! Before me flow,  
Thou endless stream of men and moving things!  
Thy every-day appearance, as it strikes —  
With wonder heightened, or sublimed by awe —  
On strangers, of all ages; the quick dance  
Of colours, lights, and forms; the deafening din;  
The comers and the goers face to face,  
Face after face; the string of dazzling wares,  
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,  
And all the tradesman's honours overhead:  
Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page,  
With letters huge inscribed from top to toe,  
Stationed above the door, like guardian saints;  
There, allegoric shapes, female or male,  
Or physiognomies of real men,  
Land-warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,  
Boyle, Shakspeare, Newton, or the attractive head  
Of some quack-doctor, famous in his day,

Meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,  
Escaped as from an enemy, we turn  
Abruptly into some sequestered nook,  
Still as a sheltered place when winds blow loud!  
At leisure, thence, through tracts of thin resort,  
And sights and sounds that come at intervals,

## THE PRELUDE

We take our way. A raree-show is here,  
With children gathered round; another street  
Presents a company of dancing dogs,  
Or dromedary, with an antic pair  
Of monkeys on his back; a minstrel band  
Of Savoyards; or, single and alone,  
An English ballad-singer. Private courts,  
Gloomy as coffins, and unsightly lanes  
Thrilled by some female vendor's scream, belike  
The very shrillest of all London cries,  
May then entangle our impatient steps;  
Conducted through those labyrinths, unawares,  
To privileged regions and inviolate,  
Where from their airy lodges studious lawyers  
Look out on waters, walks, and gardens green.

Thence back into the throng, until we reach,  
Following the tide that slackens by degrees,  
Some half-frequented scenes, where wider streets  
Bring straggling breezes of suburban air.  
Here files of ballads dangle from dead walls;  
Advertisements, of giant-size, from high  
Press forward, in all colours, on the sight;  
These, bold in conscious merit, lower down;  
*That*, fronted with a most imposing word,  
Is, peradventure, one in masquerade.

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

As on the broadening causeway we advance,  
Behold, turned upwards, a face hard and strong  
In lineaments, and red with over-toil.  
'T is one encountered here and everywhere;  
A travelling cripple, by the trunk cut short,  
And stumping on his arms. In sailor's garb  
Another lies at length, beside a range  
Of well-formed characters, with chalk inscribed  
Upon the smooth flat stones: the Nurse is here,  
The Bachelor, that loves to sun himself,  
The military Idler, and the Dame,  
That field-ward takes her walk with decent steps.

Now homeward through the thickening hubbub, where  
See, among less distinguishable shapes,  
The begging scavenger, with hat in hand;  
The Italian, as he thrids his way with care,  
Steadying, far-seen, a frame of images  
Upon his head; with basket at his breast  
The Jew; the stately and slow-moving Turk,  
With freight of slippers piled beneath his arm!

Enough; — the mighty concourse I surveyed  
With no unthinking mind, well pleased to note  
Among the crowd all specimens of man,  
Through all the colours which the sun bestows,

## THE PRELUDE

And every character of form and face:  
The Swede, the Russian; from the genial south,  
The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote  
America, the Hunter-Indian; Moors,  
Malays, Lascars, the Tartar, the Chinese,  
And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns.

At leisure, then, I viewed, from day to day,  
The spectacles within doors, — birds and beasts  
Of every nature, and strange plants convened  
From every clime; and, next, those sights that ape  
The absolute presence of reality,  
Expressing, as in mirror, sea and land,  
And what earth is, and what she has to show.  
I do not here allude to subtlest craft,  
By means refined attaining purest ends,  
But imitations, fondly made in plain  
Confession of man's weakness and his loves.  
Whether the Painter, whose ambitious skill  
Submits to nothing less than taking in  
A whole horizon's circuit, do with power,  
Like that of angels or commissioned spirits,  
Fix us upon some lofty pinnacle,  
Or in a ship on waters, with a world  
Of life, and life-like mockery beneath,  
Above, behind, far stretching and before;



## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Or more mechanic artist represent  
By scale exact, in model, wood or clay,  
From blended colours also borrowing help,  
Some miniature of famous spots or things, —  
St. Peter's Church; or, more aspiring aim,  
In microscopic vision, Rome herself;  
Or, haply, some choice rural haunt, — the Falls  
Of Tivoli; and, high upon that steep,  
The Sibyl's mouldering Temple! every tree,  
Villa, or cottage, lurking among rocks  
Throughout the landscape; tuft, stone scratch minute —  
All that the traveller sees when he is there.

Add to these exhibitions, mute and still,  
Others of wider scope, where living men,  
Music, and shifting pantomimic scenes,  
Diversified the allurements. Need I fear  
To mention by its name, as in degree,  
Lowest of these and humblest in attempt,  
Yet richly graced with honours of her own,  
Half-rural Sadler's Wells? Though at that time  
Intolerant, as is the way of youth  
Unless itself be pleased, here more than once  
Taking my seat, I saw (nor blush to add,  
With ample recompense) giants and dwarfs,  
Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins,

## THE PRELUDE

Amid the uproar of the rabblement,  
Perform their feats. Nor was it mean delight  
To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds;  
To note the laws and progress of belief;  
Though obstinate on this way, yet on that  
How willingly we travel, and how far!  
To have, for instance, brought upon the scene  
The champion, Jack the Giant-killer: Lo!  
He dons his coat of darkness on the stage  
Walks, and achieves his wonders, from the eye  
Of living Mortal covert, "as the moon  
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave."  
Delusion bold! and how can it be wrought?  
The garb he wears is black as death, the word  
"*Invisible*" flames forth upon his chest.

Here, too, were "forms and pressures of the time,"  
Rough, bold, as Grecian comedy displayed  
When Art was young; dramas of living men,  
And recent things yet warm with life; a sea-fight,  
Shipwreck, or some domestic incident  
Divulged by Truth and magnified by Fame;  
Such as the daring brotherhood of late  
Set forth, too serious theme for that light place —  
I mean, O distant Friend! a story drawn  
From our own ground, — the Maid of Buttermere, —

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

And how, unfaithful to a virtuous wife  
Deserted and deceived, the Spoiler came  
And wooed the artless daughter of the hills,  
And wedded her, in cruel mockery  
Of love and marriage bonds. These words to thee  
Must needs bring back the moment when we first,  
Ere the broad world rang with the maiden's name,  
Beheld her serving at the cottage inn;  
Both stricken, as she entered or withdrew,  
With admiration of her modest mien  
And carriage, marked by unexampled grace.  
We since that time not unfamiliarly  
Have seen her, — her discretion have observed,  
Her just opinions, delicate reserve,  
Her patience, and humility of mind  
Unspoiled by commendation and the excess  
Of public notice — an offensive light  
To a meek spirit suffering inwardly.

From this memorial tribute to my theme  
I was returning, when, with sundry forms  
Commingled — shapes which met me in the way  
That we must tread — thy image rose again,  
Maiden of Buttermere! She lives in peace  
Upon the spot where she was born and reared;  
Without contamination doth she live

## THE PRELUDE

In quietness, without anxiety:  
Beside the mountain chapel, sleeps in earth  
Her new-born infant, fearless as a lamb  
That, thither driven from some unsheltered place,  
Rests underneath the little rock-like pile  
When storms are raging. Happy are they both —  
Mother and child! — These feelings, in themselves  
Trite, do yet scarcely seem so when I think  
On those ingenuous moments of our youth  
Ere we have learnt by use to slight the crimes  
And sorrows of the world. Those simple days  
Are now my theme; and, foremost of the scenes,  
Which yet survive in memory, appears  
One, at whose centre sate a lovely Boy,  
A sportive infant, who, for six months' space,  
Not more, had been of age to deal about  
Articulate prattle — Child as beautiful  
As ever clung around a mother's neck,  
Or father fondly gazed upon with pride.  
There, too, conspicuous for stature tall  
And large dark eyes, beside her infant stood  
The mother; but, upon her cheeks diffused,  
False tints too well accorded with the glare  
From play-house lustres thrown without reserve  
On every object near. The Boy had been  
The pride and pleasure of all lookers-on

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

In whatsoever place, but seemed in this  
A sort of alien scattered from the clouds.  
Of lusty vigour, more than infantine  
He was in limb, in cheek a summer rose  
Just three parts blown — a cottage-child — if e'er,  
By cottage-door on breezy mountain-side,  
Or in some sheltering vale, was seen a babe  
By Nature's gifts so favoured. Upon a board  
Decked with refreshments had this child been placed,  
*His* little stage in the vast theatre,  
And there he sate, surrounded with a throng  
Of chance spectators, chiefly dissolute men  
And shameless women, treated and caressed;  
Ate, drank, and with the fruit and glasses played,  
While oaths and laughter and indecent speech  
Were rife about him as the songs of birds  
Contending after showers. The mother now  
Is fading out of memory, but I see  
The lovely Boy as I beheld him then  
Among the wretched and the falsely gay,  
Like one of those who walked with hair unsinged  
Amid the fiery furnace. Charms and spells  
Muttered on black and spiteful instigation  
Have stopped, as some believe, the kindest growths.  
Ah, with how different spirit might a prayer  
Have been preferred, that this fair creature, checked

## THE PRELUDE

By special privilege of Nature's love,  
Should in his childhood be retained for ever!  
But with its universal freight the tide  
Hath rolled along, and this bright innocent,  
Mary! may now have lived till he could look  
With envy on thy nameless babe that sleeps,  
Beside the mountain chapel, undisturbed.

Four rapid years had scarcely then been told  
Since, travelling southward from our pastoral hills,  
I heard, and for the first time in my life,  
The voice of woman utter blasphemy —  
Saw woman as she is, to open shame  
Abandoned, and the pride of public vice;  
I shuddered, for a barrier seemed at once  
Thrown in that from humanity divorced  
Humanity, splitting the race of man  
In twain, yet leaving the same outward form.  
Distress of mind ensued upon the sight,  
And ardent meditation. Later years  
Brought to such spectacle a milder sadness,  
Feelings of pure commiseration, grief  
For the individual and the overthrow  
Of her soul's beauty; farther I was then  
But seldom led, or wished to go; in truth  
The sorrow of the passion stopped me there.



## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

But let me now, less moved, in order take  
Our argument. Enough is said to show  
How casual incidents of real life,  
Observed where pastime only had been sought,  
Outweighed, or put to flight, the set events  
And measured passions of the stage, albeit  
By Siddons trod in the fulness of her power.  
Yet was the theatre my dear delight;  
The very gilding, lamps and painted scrolls,  
And all the mean upholstery of the place,  
Wanted not animation, when the tide  
Of pleasure ebbed but to return as fast  
With the ever-shifting figures of the scene,  
Solemn or gay: whether some beauteous dame  
Advanced in radiance through a deep recess  
Of thick entangled forest, like the moon  
Opening the clouds; or sovereign king, announced  
With flourishing trumpet, came in full-blown state  
Of the world's greatness, winding round with train  
Of courtiers, banners, and a length of guards;  
Or captive led in abject weeds, and jingling  
His slender manacles; or romping girl  
Bounced, leapt, and pawed the air; or mumbling sire,  
A scare-crow pattern of old age dressed up  
In all the tatters of infirmity  
All loosely put together, hobbled in,

## THE PRELUDE

Stumping upon a cane with which he smites,  
From time to time, the solid boards, and makes them  
Prate somewhat loudly of the whereabouts  
Of one so overloaded with his years.  
But what of this! the laugh, the grin, grimace,  
The antics striving to outstrip each other,  
Were all received, the least of them not lost,  
With an unmeasured welcome. Through the night,  
Between the show, and many-headed mass  
Of the spectators, and each several nook  
Filled with its fray or brawl, how eagerly  
And with what flashes, as it were, the mind  
Turned this way — that way! sportive and alert  
And watchful, as a kitten when at play,  
While winds are eddying round her, among straws  
And rustling leaves. Enchanting age and sweet!  
Romantic almost, looked at through a space,  
How small, of intervening years! For then,  
Though surely no mean progress had been made  
In meditations holy and sublime,  
Yet something of a girlish child-like gloss  
Of novelty survived for scenes like these;  
Enjoyment haply handed down from times  
When at a country-playhouse, some rude barn  
Tricked out for that proud use, if I perchance  
Caught, on a summer evening through a chink

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

In the old wall, an unexpected glimpse  
Of daylight, the bare thought of where I was  
Gladdened me more than if I had been led  
Into a dazzling cavern of romance,  
Crowded with Genii busy among works  
Not to be looked at by the common sun.

The matter that detains us now may seem,  
To many, neither dignified enough  
Nor arduous, yet will not be scorned by them,  
Who, looking inward, have observed the ties  
That bind the perishable hours of life  
Each to the other, and the curious props  
By which the world of memory and thought  
Exists and is sustained. More lofty themes,  
Such as at least do wear a prouder face,  
Solicit our regard; but when I think  
Of these, I feel the imaginative power  
Languish within me; even then it slept,  
When, pressed by tragic sufferings, the heart  
Was more than full; amid my sobs and tears  
It slept, even in the pregnant season of youth.  
For though I was most passionately moved  
And yielded to all changes of the scene  
With an obsequious promptness, yet the storm  
Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind;

## THE PRELUDE

Save when realities of act and mien,  
The incarnation of the spirits that move  
In harmony amid the Poet's world,  
Rose to ideal grandeur, or, called forth<sup>1</sup>  
By power of contrast, made me recognise,  
As at a glance, the things which I had shaped,  
And yet not shaped, had seen and scarcely seen,  
When, having closed the mighty Shakspeare's page,  
I mused, and thought, and felt, in solitude.

Pass we from entertainments, that are such  
Professedly, to others titled higher,  
Yet, in the estimate of youth at least,  
More near akin to those than names imply, —  
I mean the brawls of lawyers in their courts  
Before the ermined judge, or that great stage  
Where senators, tongue-favoured men, perform,  
Admired and envied. Oh! the beating heart,  
When one among the prime of these rose up, —  
One, of whose name from childhood we had heard  
Familiarly, a household term, like those,  
The Bedfords, Glosters, Salsburys, of old,  
Whom the fifth Harry talks of. Silence! hush!  
This is no trifle, no short-flighted wit,  
No stammerer of a minute, painfully  
Delivered. No! the Orator hath yoked

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

The Hours, like young Aurora, to his car:  
Thrice welcome Presence! how can patience e'er  
Grow weary of attending on a track  
That kindles with such glory! All are charmed,  
Astonished; like a hero in romance,  
He winds away his never-ending horn;  
Words follow words, sense seems to follow sense:  
What memory and what logic! till the strain  
Transcendent, superhuman as it seemed,  
Grows tedious even in a young man's ear.

Genius of Burke! forgive the pen seduced  
By specious wonders, and too slow to tell  
Of what the ingenuous, what bewildered men,  
Beginning to mistrust their boastful guides,  
And wise men, willing to grow wiser, caught,  
Rapt auditors! from thy most eloquent tongue —  
Now mute, for ever mute in the cold grave.  
I see him, — old, but vigorous in age, —  
Stand like an oak whose stag-horn branches start  
Out of its leafy brow, the more to awe  
The younger brethren of the grove. But some —  
While he forewarns, denounces, launches forth,  
Against all systems built on abstract rights,  
Keen ridicule; the majesty proclaims  
Of Institutes and Laws, hallowed by time;

## THE PRELUDE

Declares the vital power of social ties  
Endeared by Custom; and with high disdain,  
Exploding upstart Theory, insists  
Upon the allegiance to which men are born —  
Some — say at once a froward multitude —  
Murmur (for truth is hated, where not loved)  
As the winds fret within the Æolian cave,  
Galled by their monarch's chain. The times were big  
With ominous change, which, night by night, provoked  
Keen struggles, and black clouds of passion raised;  
But memorable moments intervened,  
When Wisdom, like the Goddess from Jove's brain,  
Broke forth in armour of resplendent words,  
Startling the Synod. Could a youth, and one  
In ancient story versed, whose breast had heaved  
Under the weight of classic eloquence,  
Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired?

Nor did the Pulpit's oratory fail  
To achieve its higher triumph. Not unfelt  
Were its admonishments, nor lightly heard  
The awful truths delivered thence by tongues  
Endowed with various power to search the soul;  
Yet ostentation, domineering, oft  
Poured forth harangues, how sadly out of place! —  
There have I seen a comely bachelor,



## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Fresh from a toilette of two hours, ascend  
His rostrum, with seraphic glance look up,  
And, in a tone elaborately low  
Beginning, lead his voice through many a maze  
A minuet course; and, winding up his mouth,  
From time to time, into an orifice  
Most delicate, a lurking eyelet, small,  
And only not invisible, again  
Open it out, diffusing thence a smile  
Of rapt irradiation, exquisite.  
Meanwhile the Evangelists, Isaiah, Job,  
Moses, and he who penned, the other day,  
The Death of Abel, Shakspeare, and the Bard  
Whose genius spangled o'er a gloomy theme  
With fancies thick as his inspiring stars,  
And Ossian (doubt not — 't is the naked truth)  
Summoned from streamy Morven — each and all  
Would, in their turns, lend ornaments and flowers  
To entwine the crook of eloquence that helped  
This pretty Shepherd, pride of all the plains,  
To rule and guide his captivated flock.

I glance but at a few conspicuous marks,  
Leaving a thousand others, that, in hall,  
Court, theatre, conventicle, or shop,  
In public room or private, park or street,

## THE PRELUDE

Each fondly reared on his own pedestal,  
Looked out for admiration. Folly, vice,  
Extravagance in gesture, mien, and dress,  
And all the strife of singularity,  
Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense —  
Of these, and of the living shapes they wear,  
There is no end. Such candidates for regard,  
Although well pleased to be where they were found,  
I did not hunt after, nor greatly prize,  
Nor made unto myself a secret boast  
Of reading them with quick and curious eye;  
But, as a common produce, things that are  
To-day, to-morrow will be, took of them  
Such willing note, as, on some errand bound  
That asks not speed, a traveller might bestow  
On sea-shells that bestrew the sandy beach,  
Or daisies swarming through the fields of June.

But foolishness and madness in parade,  
Though most at home in this their dear domain,  
Are scattered everywhere, no rarities,  
Even to the rudest novice of the Schools.  
Me, rather, it employed, to note, and keep  
In memory, those individual sights  
Of courage, or integrity, or truth,  
Or tenderness, which there, set off by foil,

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Appeared more touching. One will I select —  
A Father — for he bore that sacred name; —  
Him saw I, sitting in an open square,  
Upon a corner-stone of that low wall,  
Wherein were fixed the iron pales that fenced  
A spacious grass-plot; there, in silence, sate  
This One Man, with a sickly babe outstretched  
Upon his knee, whom he had thither brought  
For sunshine, and to breathe the fresher air.  
Of those who passed, and me who looked at him,  
He took no heed; but in his brawny arms  
(The Artificer was to the elbow bare,  
And from his work this moment had been stolen)  
He held the child, and, bending over it,  
As if he were afraid both of the sun  
And of the air, which he had come to seek,  
Eyed the poor babe with love unutterable.

As the black storm upon the mountain top  
Sets off the sunbeam in the valley, so  
That huge fermenting mass of human-kind  
Serves as a solemn back-ground, or relief,  
To single forms and objects, whence they draw,  
For feeling and contemplative regard,  
More than inherent liveliness and power.  
How oft, amid those overflowing streets,

## THE PRELUDE

Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said  
Unto myself, "The face of every one  
That passes by me is a mystery!"  
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed  
By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,  
Until the shapes before my eyes became  
A second-sight procession, such as glides  
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;  
And once, far-travelled in such mood, beyond  
The reach of common indication, lost  
Amid the moving pageant, I was smitten  
Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)  
Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,  
Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest  
Wearing a written paper, to explain  
His story, whence he came, and who he was.  
Caught by the spectacle my mind turned round  
As with the might of waters; and apt type  
This label seemed of the utmost we can know,  
Both of ourselves and of the universe;  
And, on the shape of that unmoving man,  
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,  
As if admonished from another world.

Though reared upon the base of outward things,  
Structures like these the excited spirit mainly

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Builds for herself; scenes different there are,  
Full-formed, that take, with small internal help,  
Possession of the faculties, — the peace  
That comes with night; the deep solemnity  
Of nature's intermediate hours of rest,  
When the great tide of human life stands still:  
The business of the day to come, unborn,  
Of that gone by, locked up, as in the grave;  
The blended calmness of the heavens and earth,  
Moonlight and stars, and empty streets, and sounds  
Unfrequent as in deserts; at late hours  
Of winter evenings, when unwholesome rains  
Are falling hard, with people yet astir,  
The feeble salutation from the voice  
Of some unhappy woman, now and then  
Heard as we pass, when no one looks about,  
Nothing is listened to. But these, I fear,  
Are falsely catalogued; things that are, are not,  
As the mind answers to them, or the heart  
Is prompt, or slow, to feel. What say you, then,  
To times, when half the city shall break out  
Full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear?  
To executions, to a street on fire,  
Mobs, riots, or rejoicings? From these sights  
Take one, — that ancient festival, the Fair,  
Holden where martyrs suffered in past time,



## THE PRELUDE

And named of St. Bartholomew; there, see  
A work completed to our hands, that lays,  
If any spectacle on earth can do,  
The whole creative powers of man asleep! —  
For once, the Muse's help will we implore,  
And she shall lodge us, wafted on her wings,  
Above the press and danger of the crowd,  
Upon some showman's platform. What a shock  
For eyes and ears! what anarchy and din,  
Barbarian and infernal, — a phantasma,  
Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!  
Below, the open space, through every nook  
Of the wide area, twinkles, is alive  
With heads; the midway region, and above,  
Is thronged with staring pictures and huge scrolls,  
Dumb proclamations of the Prodigies;  
With chattering monkeys dangling from their poles,  
And children whirling in their roundabouts;  
With those that stretch the neck and strain the eyes,  
And crack the voice in rivalry, the crowd  
Inviting; with buffoons against buffoons  
Grimacing, writhing, screaming, — him who grinds  
The hurdy-gurdy, at the fiddle weaves,  
Rattles the salt-box, thumps the kettle-drum,  
And him who at the trumpet puffs his cheeks,  
The silver-colored Negro with his timbrel,



## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Equestrians, tumblers, women, girls, and boys,  
Blue-breeched, pink-vested, with high-towering  
plumes. —

All moveables of wonder, from all parts,  
Are here — Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,  
The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig,  
The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,  
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,  
The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,  
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft  
Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet-shows,  
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,  
All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts  
Of man, his dulness, madness, and their feats  
All jumbled up together, to compose  
A Parliament of Monsters. Tents and Booths  
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast mill,  
Are vomiting, receiving on all sides,  
Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms.

Oh, blank confusion! true epitome  
Of what the mighty City is herself,  
To thousands upon thousands of her sons,  
Living amid the same perpetual whirl  
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced  
To one identity, by differences

## THE PRELUDE

That have no law, no meaning, and no end —  
Oppression, under which even highest minds  
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.  
But though the picture weary out the eye,  
By nature an unmanageable sight,  
It is not wholly so to him who looks  
In steadiness, who hath among least things  
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.  
This, of all acquisitions, first awaits  
On sundry and most widely different modes  
Of education, nor with least delight  
On that through which I passed. Attention springs,  
And comprehensiveness and memory flow,  
From early converse with the works of God  
Among all regions; chiefly where appear  
Most obviously simplicity and power.  
Think, how the everlasting streams and woods,  
Stretched and still stretching far and wide, exalt  
The roving Indian, on his desert sands:  
What grandeur not unfelt, what pregnant show  
Of beauty, meets the sun-burnt Arab's eye:  
And, as the sea propels, from zone to zone,  
Its currents; magnifies its shoals of life  
Beyond all compass; spreads, and sends aloft  
Armies of clouds, — even so, its powers and aspects

## RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Shape for mankind, by principles as fixed,  
The views and aspirations of the soul  
To majesty. Like virtue have the forms  
Perennial of the ancient hills; nor less  
The changeful language of their countenances  
Quickens the slumbering mind, and aids the  
thoughts,  
However multitudinous, to move  
With order and relation. This, if still,  
As hitherto, in freedom I may speak,  
Not violating any just restraint,  
As may be hoped, of real modesty, —  
This did I feel, in London's vast domain.  
The Spirit of Nature was upon me there;  
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life  
Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused,  
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press  
Of self-destroying, transitory things,  
Composure, and ennobling Harmony.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK EIGHTH

### RETROSPECT — LOVE OF NATURE LEADING TO LOVE OF MAN

WHAT sounds are those, Helvellyn, that are heard  
Up to thy summit, through the depth of air  
Ascending, as if distance had the power  
To make the sounds more audible? What crowd  
Covers, or sprinkles o'er, yon village green?  
Crowd seems it, solitary hill! to thee,  
Though but a little family of men,  
Shepherds and tillers of the ground — betimes  
Assembled with their children and their wives,  
And here and there a stranger interspersed.  
They hold a rustic fair — a festival,  
Such as, on this side now, and now on that,  
Repeated through his tributary vales,  
Helvellyn, in the silence of his rest,  
Sees annually, if clouds towards either ocean  
Blown from their favourite resting-place, or mists  
Dissolved, have left him an unshrouded head.  
Delightful day it is for all who dwell  
In this secluded glen, and eagerly  
They give it welcome. Long ere heat of noon,  
From byre or field the kine were brought; the  
sheep

## RETROSPECT

Are penned in cotes; the chaffering is begun.  
The heifer lows, uneasy at the voice  
Of a new master; bleat the flocks aloud.  
Booths are there none; a stall or two is here;  
A lame man or a blind, the one to beg,  
The other to make music; hither, too,  
From far, with basket, slung upon her arm,  
Of hawker's wares — books, pictures, combs, and  
pins —

Some aged woman finds her way again,  
Year after year, a punctual visitant!  
There also stands a speech-maker by rote,  
Pulling the strings of his boxed raree-show;  
And in the lapse of many years may come  
Prouder itinerant, mountebank, or he  
Whose wonders in a covered wain lie hid.  
But one there is, the loveliest of them all,  
Some sweet lass of the valley, looking out  
For gains, and who that sees her would not buy?  
Fruits of her father's orchard are her wares,  
And with the ruddy produce she walks round  
Among the crowd, half pleased with, half ashamed  
Of, her new office, blushing restlessly.  
The children now are rich, for the old to-day  
Are generous as the young; and, if content  
With looking on, some ancient wedded pair

## THE PRELUDE

Sit in the shade together; while they gaze,  
“A cheerful smile unbends the wrinkled brow,  
The days departed start again to life,  
And all the scenes of childhood reappear,  
Faint, but more tranquil, like the changing sun  
To him who slept at noon and wakes at eve.”<sup>9</sup>  
Thus gaiety and cheerfulness prevail,  
Spreading from young to old, from old to young,  
And no one seems to want his share. — Immense  
Is the recess, the circumambient world  
Magnificent, by which they are embraced:  
They move about upon the soft green turf:  
How little they, they and their doings, seem,  
And all that they can further or obstruct!  
Through utter weakness pitifully dear,  
As tender infants are: and yet how great!  
For all things serve them: them the morning light  
Loves, as it glistens on the silent rocks;  
And them the silent rocks, which now from high  
Look down upon them; the reposing clouds;  
The wild brooks prattling from invisible haunts;  
And old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir  
Which animates this day their calm abode.

With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel,  
In that enormous City's turbulent world



## RETROSPECT

Of men and things, what benefit I owed  
To thee, and those domains of rural peace,  
Where to the sense of beauty first my heart  
Was opened; tract more exquisitely fair  
Than that famed paradise of ten thousand trees,  
Or Gehol's matchless gardens, for delight  
Of the Tartarian dynasty composed  
(Beyond that mighty wall, not fabulous,  
China's stupendous mound) by patient toil  
Of myriads and boon nature's lavish help;  
There, in a clime from widest empire chosen,  
Fulfilling (could enchantment have done more?)  
A sumptuous dream of flowery lawns, with domes  
Of pleasure sprinkled over, shady dells  
For eastern monasteries, sunny mounts  
With temples crested, bridges, gondolas,  
Rocks, dens, and groves of foliage taught to melt  
Into each other their obsequious hues,  
Vanished and vanishing in subtle chase,  
Too fine to be pursued; or standing forth  
In no discordant opposition, strong  
And gorgeous as the colours side by side  
Bedded among rich plumes of tropic birds;  
And mountains over all, embracing all;  
And all the landscape, endlessly enriched  
With waters running, falling, or asleep.

## THE PRELUDE

But lovelier far than this, the paradise  
Where I was reared; in Nature's primitive gifts  
Favoured no less, and more to every sense  
Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,  
The elements, and seasons as they change,  
Do find a worthy fellow-labourer there —  
Man free, man working for himself, with choice  
Of time, and place, and object; by his wants,  
His comforts, native occupations, cares,  
Cheerfully led to individual ends  
Or social, and still followed by a train  
Unwooded, unthought-of even — simplicity,  
And beauty, and inevitable grace.

Yea, when a glimpse of those imperial bowers  
Would to a child be transport over-great,  
When but a half-hour's roam through such a place  
Would leave behind a dance of images,  
That shall break in upon his sleep for weeks;  
Even then the common haunts of the green earth,  
And ordinary interests of man,  
Which they embosom, all without regard  
As both may seem, are fastening on the heart  
Insensibly, each with the other's help.  
For me, when my affections first were led  
From kindred, friends, and playmates, to partake



*The Shepherd*









## RETROSPECT

Love for the human creature's absolute self,  
That noticeable kindliness of heart  
Sprang out of fountains, there abounding most,  
Where sovereign Nature dictated the tasks  
And occupations which her beauty adorned,  
And Shepherds were the men that pleased me first;  
Not such as Saturn ruled 'mid Latian wilds,  
With arts and laws so tempered; that their lives  
Left, even to us toiling in this late day,  
A bright tradition of the golden age;  
Not such as, 'mid Arcadian fastnesses  
Sequestered, handed down among themselves  
Felicity, in Grecian song renowned;  
Nor such as — when an adverse fate had driven,  
From house and home, the courtly band whose fortunes  
Entered, with Shakspeare's genius, the wild woods  
Of Arden — amid sunshine or in shade  
Culled the best fruits of Time's uncounted hours,  
Ere Phœbe sighed for the false Ganymede;  
Or there where Perdita and Florizel  
Together danced, Queen of the feast, and King;  
Nor such as Spenser fabled. True it is,  
That I had heard (what he perhaps had seen)  
Of maids at sunrise bringing in from far  
Their May-bush, and along the streets in flocks  
Parading with a song of taunting rhymes,

## THE PRELUDE

Aimed at the laggards slumbering within doors;  
Had also heard, from those who yet remembered,  
Tales of the May-pole dance, and wreaths that  
decked

Porch, door-way, or kirk-pillar; and of youths,  
Each with his maid, before the sun was up,  
By annual custom, issuing forth in troops,  
To drink the waters of some sainted well,  
And hang it round with garlands. Love survives;  
But, for such purpose, flowers no longer grow:  
The times, too sage, perhaps too proud. have  
dropped

These lighter graces; and the rural ways  
And manners which my childhood looked upon  
Were the unluxuriant produce of a life  
Intent on little but substantial needs,  
Yet rich in beauty, beauty that was felt.  
But images of danger and distress,  
Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms;  
Of this I heard, and saw enough to make  
Imagination restless; nor was free  
Myself from frequent perils; nor were tales  
Wanting, — the tragedies of former times,  
Hazards and strange escapes, of which the rocks  
Immutable, and everflowing streams,  
Where'er I roamed, were speaking monuments.

## RETROSPECT

Smooth life had flock and shepherd in old time,  
Long springs and tepid winters, on the banks  
Of delicate Galesus; and no less  
Those scattered along Adria's myrtle shores:  
Smooth life had herdsman, and his snow-white herd  
To triumphs and to sacrificial rites  
Devoted, on the inviolable stream  
Of rich Clitumnus; and the goat-herd lived  
As calmly, underneath the pleasant brows  
Of cool Lucretilis, where the pipe was heard  
Of Pan, Invisible God, thrilling the rocks  
With tutelary music, from all harm  
The fold protecting. I myself, mature  
In manhood then, have seen a pastoral tract  
Like one of these, where Fancy might run wild,  
Though under skies less generous, less serene:  
There, for her own delight had Nature framed  
A pleasure-ground, diffused a fair expanse  
Of level pasture, islanded with groves  
And banked with woody risings; but the Plain  
Endless, here opening widely out, and there  
Shut up in lesser lakes or beds of lawn  
And intricate recesses, creek or bay  
Sheltered within a shelter, where at large  
The shepherd strays, a rolling hut his home.  
Thither he comes with spring-time, there abides

## THE PRELUDE

All summer, and at sunrise ye may hear  
His flageolet to liquid notes of love  
Attuned, or sprightly fife resounding far.  
Nook is there none, nor tract of that vast space  
Where passage opens, but the same shall have  
In turn its visitant, telling there his hours  
In unlaborious pleasure, with no task  
More toilsome than to carve a beechen bowl  
For spring or fountain, which the traveller finds,  
When through the region he pursues at will  
His devious course. A glimpse of such sweet life  
I saw when, from the melancholy walls  
Of Goslar, once imperial, I renewed  
My daily walk along that wide champaign,  
That, reaching to her gates, spreads east and west,  
And northwards, from beneath the mountainous verge  
Of the Hercynian forest. Yet, hail to you  
Moors, mountains, headlands, and ye hollow vales,  
Ye long deep channels for the Atlantic's voice,  
Powers of my native region! Ye that seize  
The heart with firmer grasp! Your snows and streams  
Ungovernable, and your terrifying winds,  
That howl so dismally for him who treads  
Companionless your awful solitudes!  
There, 't is the shepherd's task the winter long  
To wait upon the storms: of their approach

## RETROSPECT

Sagacious, into sheltering coves he drives  
His flock, and thither from the homestead bears  
A toilsome burden up the craggy ways,  
And deals it out, their regular nourishment  
Strewn on the frozen snow. And when the spring  
Looks out, and all the pastures dance with lambs,  
And when the flock, with warmer weather, climbs  
Higher and higher, him his office leads  
To watch their goings, whatsoever track  
The wanderers choose. For this he quits his home  
At day-spring, and no sooner doth the sun  
Begin to strike him with a fire-like heat,  
Than he lies down upon some shining rock,  
And breakfasts with his dog. When they have stolen,  
As is their wont, a pittance from strict time,  
For rest not needed or exchange of love,  
Then from his couch he starts; and now his feet  
Crush out a livelier fragrance from the flowers  
Of lowly thyme, by Nature's skill enwrought  
In the wild turf: the lingering dews of morn  
Smoke round him, as from hill to hill he hies,  
His staff protending like a hunter's spear,  
Or by its aid leaping from crag to crag,  
And o'er the brawling beds of unbridged streams.  
Philosophy, methinks, at Fancy's call,  
Might deign to follow him through what he does

## THE PRELUDE

Or sees in his day's march; himself he feels,  
In those vast regions where his service lies,  
A freeman, wedded to his life of hope  
And hazard, and hard labour interchanged  
With that majestic indolence so dear  
To native man. A rambling schoolboy, thus,  
I felt his presence in his own domain,  
As of a lord and master, or a power,  
Or genius, under Nature, under God,  
Presiding; and severest solitude  
Had more commanding looks when he was there.  
When up the lonely brooks on rainy days  
Angling I went, or trod the trackless hills  
By mists bewildered, suddenly mine eyes  
Have glanced upon him distant a few steps,  
In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,  
His sheep like Greenland bears; or, as he stepped  
Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow,  
His form hath flashed upon me, glorified  
By the deep radiance of the setting sun:  
Or him have I descried in distant sky,  
A solitary object and sublime,  
Above all height! like an aerial cross  
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock  
Of the Chartreuse, for worship. Thus was man  
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,



## RETROSPECT

And thus my heart was early introduced  
To an unconscious love and reverence  
Of human nature; hence the human form  
To me became an index of delight,  
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness.  
Meanwhile this creature — spiritual almost  
As those of books, but more exalted far;  
Far more of an imaginative form  
Than the gay Corin of the groves, who lives  
For his own fancies, or to dance by the hour,  
In coronal, with Phyllis in the midst —  
Was, for the purposes of kind, a man  
With the most common; husband, father; learned,  
Could teach, admonish; suffered with the rest  
From vice and folly, wretchedness and fear;  
Of this I little saw, cared less for it,  
But something must have felt.

Call ye these appearances —  
Which I beheld of shepherds in my youth,  
This sanctity of Nature given to man —  
A shadow, a delusion, ye who pore  
On the dead letter, miss the spirit of things;  
Whose truth is not a motion or a shape  
Instinct with vital functions, but a block  
Or waxen image which yourselves have made,  
And ye adore! But blessed be the God

## THE PRELUDE

Of Nature and of Man that this was so;  
That men before my inexperienced eyes  
Did first present themselves thus purified,  
Removed, and to a distance that was fit:  
And so we all of us in some degree  
Are led to knowledge, wheresoever led,  
And howsoever; were it otherwise,  
And we found evil fast as we find good  
In our first years, or think that it is found,  
How could the innocent heart bear up and live!  
But doubly fortunate my lot; not here  
Alone, that something of a better life  
Perhaps was round me than it is the privilege  
Of most to move in, but that first I looked  
At Man through objects that were great or fair;  
First communed with him by their help. And thus  
Was founded a sure safeguard and defence  
Against the weight of meanness, selfish cares,  
Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in  
On all sides from the ordinary world  
In which we traffic. Starting from this point  
I had my face turned toward the truth, began  
With an advantage furnished by that kind  
Of prepossession, without which the soul  
Receives no knowledge that can bring forth good,  
No genuine insight ever comes to her.

## RETROSPECT

From the restraint of over-watchful eyes  
Preserved, I moved about, year after year,  
Happy, and now most thankful that my walk  
Was guarded from too early intercourse  
With the deformities of crowded life,  
And those ensuing laughters and contempts,  
Self-pleasing, which, if we would wish to think  
With a due reverence on earth's rightful lord,  
Here placed to be the inheritor of heaven,  
Will not permit us; but pursue the mind,  
That to devotion willingly would rise,  
Into the temple and the temple's heart.

Yet deem not, Friend! that human kind with me  
Thus early took a place pre-eminent;  
Nature herself was, at this unripe time,  
But secondary to my own pursuits  
And animal activities, and all  
Their trivial pleasures; and when these had drooped  
And gradually expired, and Nature, prized  
For her own sake, became my joy, even then —  
And upwards through late youth, until not less  
Than two-and-twenty summers had been told —  
Was Man in my affections and regards  
Subordinate to her, her visible forms  
And viewless agencies: a passion, she,

## THE PRELUDE

A rapture often, and immediate love  
Ever at hand; he, only a delight  
Occasional, an accidental grace,  
His hour being not yet come. Far less had then  
The inferior creatures, beast or bird, attuned  
My spirit to that gentleness of love,  
(Though they had long been carefully observed),  
Won from me those minute obeisances  
Of tenderness, which I may number now  
With my first blessings. Nevertheless, on these  
The light of beauty did not fall in vain,  
Or grandeur circumfuse them to no end.

But when that first poetic faculty  
Of plain Imagination and severe,  
No longer a mute influence of the soul,  
Ventured, at some rash Muse's earnest call,  
To try her strength among harmonious words;  
And to book-notions and the rules of art  
Did knowingly conform itself; there came  
Among the simple shapes of human life  
A wilfulness of fancy and conceit;  
And Nature and her objects beautified  
These fictions, as in some sort, in their turn,  
They burnished her. From touch of this new power  
Nothing was safe: the elder-tree that grew

## RETROSPECT

Beside the well-known charnel-house had then  
A dismal look: the yew-tree had its ghost,  
That took his station there for ornament:  
The dignities of plain occurrence then  
Were tasteless, and truth's golden mean, a point  
Where no sufficient pleasure could be found.  
Then, if a widow, staggering with the blow  
Of her distress, was known to have turned her steps  
To the cold grave in which her husband slept,  
One night, or haply more than one, through pain  
Or half-insensate impotence of mind,  
The fact was caught at greedily, and there  
She must be visitant the whole year through,  
Wetting the turf with never-ending tears.

Through quaint obliquities I might pursue  
These cravings; when the foxglove, one by one,  
Upwards through every stage of the tall stem,  
Had shed beside the public way its bells,  
And stood of all dismantled, save the last  
Left at the tapering ladder's top, that seemed  
To bend as doth a slender blade of grass  
Tipped with a rain-drop, Fancy loved to seat,  
Beneath the plant despoiled, but crested still  
With this last relic, soon itself to fall,  
Some vagrant mother, whose arch little ones,

## THE PRELUDE

All unconcerned by her dejected plight,  
Laughed as with rival eagerness their hands  
Gathered the purple cups that round them lay,  
Strewing the turf's green slope.

A diamond light

(Whene'er the summer sun, declining, smote  
A smooth rock wet with constant springs) was seen  
Sparkling from out a copse-clad bank that rose  
Fronting our cottage. Oft beside the hearth  
Seated, with open door, often and long  
Upon this restless lustre have I gazed,  
That made my fancy restless as itself.  
'T was now for me a burnished silver shield  
Suspended over a knight's tomb, who lay  
Inglorious, buried in the dusky wood:  
An entrance now into some magic cave  
Or palace built by fairies of the rock;  
Nor could I have been bribed to disenchant  
The spectacle, by visiting the spot.  
Thus wilful Fancy, in no hurtful mood,  
Engrafted far-fetched shapes on feelings bred  
By pure Imagination: busy Power  
She was, and with her ready pupil turned  
Instinctively to human passions, then  
Least understood. Yet, 'mid the fervent swarm  
Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich



## RETROSPECT

As mine was through the bounty of a grand  
And lovely region, I had forms distinct  
To steady me: each airy thought revolved  
Round a substantial centre, which at once  
Incited it to motion, and controlled.  
I did not pine like one in cities bred,  
As was thy melancholy lot, dear Friend!  
Great Spirit as thou art, in endless dreams  
Of sickness, disjoining, joining, things  
Without the light of knowledge. Where the harm,  
If, when the woodman languished with disease  
Induced by sleeping nightly on the ground  
Within his sod-built cabin, Indian-wise,  
I called the pangs of disappointed love,  
And all the sad etcetera of the wrong,  
To help him to his grave? Meanwhile the man,  
If not already from the woods retired  
To die at home, was haply, as I knew,  
Withering by slow degrees, 'mid gentle airs,  
Birds, running streams, and hills so beautiful  
On golden evenings, while the charcoal pile  
Breathed up its smoke, an image of his ghost  
Or spirit that full soon must take her flight.  
Nor shall we not be tending towards that point  
Of sound humanity to which our Tale  
Leads, though by sinuous ways, if here I show]

## THE PRELUDE

How Fancy, in a season when she wove  
Those slender cords, to guide the unconscious Boy  
For the Man's sake, could feed at Nature's call  
Some pensive musings which might well beseem  
Maturer years.

A grove there is whose boughs  
Stretch from the western marge of Thurstonmere,  
With length of shade so thick, that whoso glides  
Along the line of low-roofed water, moves  
As in a cloister. Once — while, in that shade  
Loitering, I watched the golden beams of light  
Flung from the setting sun, as they reposed  
In silent beauty on the naked ridge  
Of a high eastern hill — thus flowed my thoughts  
In a pure stream of words fresh from the heart:  
<sup>10</sup> Dear native Regions, wheresoe'er shall close  
My mortal course, there will I think on you;  
Dying, will cast on you a backward look;  
Even as this setting sun (albeit the Vale  
Is no where touched by one memorial gleam)  
Doth with the fond remains of his last power  
Still linger, and a farewell lustre sheds,  
On the dear mountain-tops where first he rose.

Enough of humble arguments; recall,  
My Song! those high emotions which thy voice

## RETROSPECT

Has heretofore made known; that bursting forth  
Of sympathy, inspiring and inspired,  
When everywhere a vital pulse was felt,  
And all the several frames of things, like stars,  
Through every magnitude distinguishable,  
Shone mutually indebted, or half lost  
Each in the other's blaze, a galaxy  
Of life and glory. In the midst stood Man,  
Outwardly, inwardly contemplated,  
As, of all visible natures, crown, though born  
Of dust, and kindred to the worm; a Being,  
Both in perception and discernment, first  
In every capability of rapture,  
Through the divine effect of power and love;  
As, more than anything we know, instinct  
With godhead, and, by reason and by will,  
Acknowledging dependency sublime.

Ere long, the lonely mountains left, I moved,  
Begirt, from day to day, with temporal shapes  
Of vice and folly thrust upon my view,  
Objects of sport, and ridicule, and scorn,  
Manners and characters discriminate,  
And little bustling passions that eclipse,  
As well they might, the impersonated thought,  
The idea, or abstraction of the kind.

## THE PRELUDE

An idler among academic bowers,  
Such was my new condition, as at large  
Has been set forth; yet here the vulgar light  
Of present, actual, superficial life,  
Gleaming through colouring of other times,  
Old usages and local privilege,  
Was welcomed, softened, if not solemnised.  
This notwithstanding, being brought more near  
To vice and guilt, forerunning wretchedness,  
I trembled, — thought, at times, of human life  
With an indefinite terror and dismay,  
Such as the storms and angry elements  
Had bred in me; but gloomier far, a dim  
Analogy to uproar and misrule,  
Disquiet, danger, and obscurity.

It might be told (but wherefore speak of things  
Common to all?) that, seeing, I was led  
Gravely to ponder — judging between good  
And evil, not as for the mind's delight  
But for her guidance — one who was to *act*,  
As sometimes to the best of feeble means  
I did, by human sympathy impelled:  
And, through dislike and most offensive pain,  
Was to the truth conducted; of this faith  
Never forsaken, that, by acting well,

## RETROSPECT

And understanding, I should learn to love  
The end of life, and everything we know.

Grave Teacher, stern Preceptress! for at times  
Thou canst put on an aspect most severe;  
London, to thee I willingly return.  
Erewhile my verse played idly with the flowers  
Enwrought upon thy mantle; satisfied  
With that amusement, and a simple look  
Of child-like inquisition now and then  
Cast upwards on thy countenance, to detect  
Some inner meanings which might harbour there.  
But how could I in mood so light indulge,  
Keeping such fresh remembrance of the day,  
When, having thridded the long labyrinth  
Of the suburban villages, I first  
Entered thy vast dominion? On the roof  
Of an itinerant vehicle I sate,  
With vulgar men about me, trivial forms  
Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things, —  
Mean shapes on every side: but, at the instant,  
When to myself it fairly might be said,  
The threshold now is overpast, (how strange  
That aught external to the living mind  
Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was),  
A weight of ages did at once descend

## THE PRELUDE

Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no  
Distinct remembrances, but weight and power, —  
Power growing under weight: alas! I feel  
That I am trifling: 't was a moment's pause, —  
All that took place within me came and went  
As in a moment; yet with Time it dwells,  
And grateful memory, as a thing divine.

The curious traveller, who, from open day,  
Hath passed with torches into some huge cave,  
The Grotto of Antiparos, or the Den  
In old time haunted by that Danish Witch,  
Yordas; he looks around and sees the vault  
Widening on all sides; sees, or thinks he sees,  
Erelong, the massy roof above his head,  
That instantly unsettles and recedes, —  
Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all  
Commingled, making up a canopy  
Of shapes and forms and tendencies to shape  
That shift and vanish, change and interchange  
Like spectres, — ferment silent and sublime!  
That after a short space works less and less,  
Till, every effort, every motion gone,  
The scene before him stands in perfect view  
Exposed, and lifeless as a written book! —  
But let him pause awhile, and look again,



## RETROSPECT

And a new quickening shall succeed, at first  
Beginning timidly, then creeping fast,  
Till the whole cave, so late a senseless mass,  
Busies the eye with images and forms  
Boldly assembled, — here is shadowed forth  
From the projections, wrinkles, cavities,  
A variegated landscape, — there the shape  
Of some gigantic warrior clad in mail,  
The ghostly semblance of a hooded monk,  
Veiled nun, or pilgrim resting on his staff:  
Strange congregation! yet not slow to meet  
Eyes that perceive through minds that can inspire.

Even in such sort had I at first been moved,  
Nor otherwise continued to be moved,  
As I explored the vast metropolis,  
Fount of my country's destiny and the world's;  
That great emporium, chronicle at once  
And burial-place of passions, and their home  
Imperial, their chief living residence.

With strong sensations teeming as it did  
Of past and present, such a place must needs  
Have pleased me, seeking knowledge at that time  
Far less than craving power; yet knowledge came,  
Sought or unsought, and influxes of power

## THE PRELUDE

Came, of themselves, or at her call derived  
In fits of kindest apprehensiveness,  
From all sides, when whate'er was in itself  
Capacious found, or seemed to find, in me  
A correspondent amplitude of mind;  
Such is the strength and glory of our youth!  
The human nature unto which I felt  
That I belonged, and revered with love,  
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit  
Diffused through time and space, with aid derived  
Of evidence from monuments, erect,  
Prostrate, or leaning towards their common rest  
In earth, the widely scattered wreck sublime  
Of vanished nations, or more clearly drawn  
From books and what they picture and record.

'T is true, the history of our native land —  
With those of Greece compared and popular  
Rome,  
And in our high-wrought modern narratives  
Stript of their harmonising soul, the life  
Of manners and familiar incidents —  
Had never much delighted me. And less  
Than other intellects had mine been used  
To lean upon extrinsic circumstance  
Of record or tradition; but a sense

## RETROSPECT

Of what in the Great City had been done  
And suffered, and was doing, suffering, still,  
Weighed with me, could support the test of  
thought;  
And, in despite of all that had gone by,  
Or was departing never to return,  
There I conversed with majesty and power  
Like independent natures. Hence the place  
Was thronged with impregnations like the Wilds  
In which my early feelings had been nursed —  
Bare hills and valleys, full of caverns, rocks,  
And audible seclusions, dashing lakes,  
Echoes and waterfalls, and pointed crags  
That into music touch the passing wind.  
Here then my young imagination found  
No uncongenial element; could here  
Among new objects serve or give command,  
Even as the heart's occasions might require,  
To forward reason's else too-scrupulous march.  
The effect was, still more elevated views  
Of human nature. Neither vice nor guilt,  
Debasement undergone by body or mind,  
Nor all the misery forced upon my sight,  
Misery not lightly passed, but sometimes scanned  
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust  
In what we *may* become; induce belief

## THE PRELUDE

That I was ignorant, had been falsely taught,  
A solitary, who with vain conceits  
Had been inspired, and walked about in dreams.  
From those sad scenes when meditation turned,  
Lo! everything that was indeed divine  
Retained its purity inviolate,  
Nay brighter shone, by this portentous gloom  
Set off; such opposition as aroused  
The mind of Adam, yet in Paradise  
Though fallen from bliss, when in the East he saw  
<sup>11</sup> Darkness ere day's mid course, and morning light  
More orient in the western cloud, that drew  
O'er the blue firmament a radiant white,  
Descending slow with something heavenly fraught.

Add also, that among the multitudes  
Of that huge city, oftentimes was seen  
Affectingly set forth, more than elsewhere  
Is possible, the unity of man,  
One spirit over ignorance and vice  
Predominant, in good and evil hearts;  
One sense for moral judgments, as one eye  
For the sun's light. The soul when smitten thus  
By a sublime *idea*, whencesoe'er  
Vouchsafed for union or communion, feeds  
On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God.

## RETROSPECT

Thus from a very early age, O Friend!  
My thoughts by slow gradations had been drawn  
To human-kind, and to the good and ill  
Of human life: Nature had led me on;  
And oft amid the “busy hum” I seemed  
To travel independent of her help,  
As if I had forgotten her; but no,  
The world of human-kind outweighed not hers  
In my habitual thoughts; the scale of love,  
Though filling daily, still was light, compared  
With that in which *her* mighty objects lay.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK NINTH

### RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

EVEN as a river, — partly (it might seem)  
Yielding to old remembrances, and swayed  
In part by fear to shape a way direct,  
That would engulph him soon in the ravenous sea —  
Turns, and will measure back his course, far back,  
Seeking the very regions which he crossed  
In his first outset; so have we, my Friend!  
Turned and returned with intricate delay.  
Or as a traveller, who has gained the brow  
Of some aerial Down, while there he halts  
For breathing-time, is tempted to review  
The region left behind him; and, if aught  
Deserving notice have escaped regard,  
Or been regarded with too careless eye,  
Strives, from that height, with one and yet one  
more

Last look, to make the best amends he may:  
So have we lingered. Now we start afresh  
With courage, and new hope risen on our toil.  
Fair greetings to this shapeless eagerness,  
Whene'er it comes! needful in work so long,  
Thrice needful to the argument which now  
Awaits us! Oh, how much unlike the past!



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Free as a colt at pasture on the hill,  
I ranged at large, through London's wide domain,  
Month after month. Obscurely did I live,  
Not seeking frequent intercourse with men,  
By literature, or elegance, or rank,  
Distinguished. Scarcely was a year thus spent  
Ere I forsook the crowded solitude,  
With less regret for its luxurious pomp,  
And all the nicely-guarded shows of art,  
Than for the humble book-stalls in the streets,  
Exposed to eye and hand where'er I turned.

France lured me forth; the realm that I had crossed  
So lately, journeying toward the snow-clad Alps.  
But now, relinquishing the scrip and staff,  
And all enjoyment which the summer sun  
Sheds round the steps of those who meet the day  
With motion constant as his own, I went  
Prepared to sojourn in a pleasant town,  
Washed by the current of the stately Loire.

Through Paris lay my readiest course, and there  
Sojourning a few days, I visited  
In haste, each spot of old or recent fame,  
The latter chiefly; from the field of Mars  
Down to the suburbs of St. Antony,

## THE PRELUDE

And from Mont Martre southward to the Dome  
Of Geneviève. In both her clamorous Halls,  
The National Synod and the Jacobins,  
I saw the Revolutionary Power  
Toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms;  
The Arcades I traversed, in the Palace huge  
Of Orleans; coasted round and round the line  
Of Tavern, Brothel, Gaming-house, and Shop,  
Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk  
Of all who had a purpose, or had not;  
I stared and listened, with a stranger's ears,  
To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild!  
And hissing Factionists with ardent eyes,  
In knots, or pairs, or single. Not a look  
Hope takes, or Doubt or Fear is forced to wear,  
But seemed there present; and I scanned them all,  
Watched every gesture uncontrollable,  
Of anger, and vexation, and despite,  
All side by side, and struggling face to face,  
With gaiety and dissolute idleness.

Where silent zephyrs sported with the dust  
Of the Bastille, I sate in the open sun,  
And from the rubbish gathered up a stone,  
And pocketed the relic, in the guise  
Of an enthusiast: yet, in honest truth,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

I looked for something that I could not find,  
Affecting more emotion than I felt;  
For 't is most certain, that these various sights,  
However potent their first shock, with me  
Appeared to recompense the traveller's pains  
Less than the painted Magdalene of Le Brun,  
A beauty exquisitely wrought, with hair  
Dishevelled, gleaming eyes, and rueful cheek  
Pale and bedropped with overflowing tears.

But hence to my more permanent abode  
I hasten; there, by novelties in speech,  
Domestic manners, customs, gestures, looks,  
And all the attire of ordinary life,  
Attention was engrossed; and, thus amused,  
I stood 'mid those concussions, unconcerned,  
Tranquil almost, and careless as a flower  
Glassed in a green-house, or a parlour shrub  
That spreads its leaves in unmolested peace,  
While every bush and tree, the country through,  
Is shaking to the roots: indifference this  
Which may seem strange: but I was unprepared  
With needful knowledge, had abruptly passed  
Into a theatre, whose stage was filled  
And busy with an action far advanced.  
Like others, I had skimmed, and sometimes read

## THE PRELUDE

With care, the master pamphlets of the day;  
Nor wanted such half-insight as grew wild  
Upon that meagre soil, helped out by talk  
And public news; but having never seen  
A chronicle that might suffice to show  
Whence the main organs of the public power  
Had sprung, their transmigrations, when and how  
Accomplished, giving thus unto events  
A form and body; all things were to me  
Loose and disjointed, and the affections left  
Without a vital interest. At that time,  
Moreover, the first storm was overblown,  
And the strong hand of outward violence  
Locked up in quiet. For myself, I fear  
Now, in connection with so great a theme,  
To speak (as I must be compelled to do)  
Of one so unimportant; night by night  
Did I frequent the formal haunts of men,  
Whom, in the city, privilege of birth  
Sequestered from the rest, societies  
Polished in arts, and in punctilio versed;  
Whence, and from deeper causes, all discourse  
Of good and evil of the time was shunned  
With scrupulous care; but these restrictions soon  
Proved tedious, and I gradually withdrew  
Into a noisier world, and thus ere long

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Became a patriot; and my heart was all  
Given to the people, and my love was theirs.

A band of military Officers,  
Then stationed in the city, were the chief  
Of my associates: some of these wore swords  
That had been seasoned in the wars, and all  
Were men well-born; the chivalry of France.  
In age and temper differing, they had yet  
One spirit ruling in each heart; alike  
(Save only one, hereafter to be named)  
Were bent upon undoing what was done:  
This was their rest and only hope; therewith  
No fear had they of bad becoming worse,  
For worst to them was come; nor would have stirred,  
Or deemed it worth a moment's thought to stir,  
In anything, save only as the act  
Looked thitherward. One, reckoning by years,  
Was in the prime of manhood, and erewhile  
He had sate lord in many tender hearts;  
Though heedless of such honours now, and changed:  
His temper was quite mastered by the times,  
And they had blighted him, had eaten away  
The beauty of his person, doing wrong  
Alike to body and to mind: his port,  
Which once had been erect and open, now

## THE PRELUDE

Was stooping and contracted, and a face,  
Endowed by Nature with her fairest gifts  
Of symmetry and light and bloom, expressed,  
As much as any that was ever seen,  
A ravage out of season, made by thoughts  
Unhealthy and vexatious. With the hour,  
That from the press of Paris duly brought  
Its freight of public news, the fever came,  
A punctual visitant, to shake this man,  
Disarmed his voice and fanned his yellow cheek  
Into a thousand colours; while he read,  
Or mused, his sword was haunted by his touch  
Continually, like an uneasy place  
In his own body. 'T was in truth an hour  
Of universal ferment; mildest men  
Were agitated; and commotions, strife  
Of passion and opinion, filled the walls  
Of peaceful houses with unquiet sounds.  
The soil of common life was, at that time,  
Too hot to tread upon. Oft said I then,  
And not then only, "What a mockery this  
Of history, the past and that to come!  
Now do I feel how all men are deceived,  
Reading of nations and their works, in faith,  
Faith given to vanity and emptiness;  
Oh! laughter for the page that would reflect



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

To future times the face of what now is!"  
The land all swarmed with passion, like a plain  
Devoured by locusts, — Carra, Gorsas, — add  
A hundred other names, forgotten now,  
Nor to be heard of more; yet they were powers,  
Like earthquakes, shocks repeated day by day,  
And felt through every nook of town and field.

Such was the state of things. Meanwhile the chief  
Of my associates stood prepared for flight  
To augment the band of emigrants in arms  
Upon the borders of the Rhine, and leagued  
With foreign foes mustered for instant war.  
This was their undisguised intent, and they  
Were waiting with the whole of their desires  
The moment to depart.

An Englishman,  
Born in a land whose very name appeared  
To license some unruliness of mind;  
A stranger, with youth's further privilege,  
And the indulgence that a half-learnt speech  
Wins from the courteous; I, who had been else  
Shunned and not tolerated, freely lived  
With these defenders of the Crown, and talked,  
And heard their notions; nor did they disdain  
The wish to bring me over to their cause.

## THE PRELUDE

But though untaught by thinking or by books  
To reason well of polity or law,  
And nice distinctions, then on every tongue,  
Of natural rights and civil; and to acts  
Of nations and their passing interests  
(If with unworldly ends and aims compared)  
Almost indifferent, even the historian's tale  
Prizing but little otherwise than I prized  
Tales of the poets, as it made the heart  
Beat high, and filled the fancy with fair forms,  
Old heroes and their sufferings and their deeds;  
Yet in the regal sceptre, and the pomp  
Of orders and degrees, I nothing found  
Then, or had ever, even in crudest youth,  
That dazzled me, but rather what I mourned  
And ill could brook, beholding that the best  
Ruled not, and feeling that they ought to rule.

For, born in a poor district, and which yet  
Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,  
Than any other nook of English ground,  
It was my fortune scarcely to have seen,  
Through the whole tenor of my school-day time,  
The face of one, who, whether boy or man,  
Was vested with attention or respect  
Through claims of wealth or blood; nor was it least

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Of many benefits, in later years  
Derived from academic institutes  
And rules, that they held something up to view  
Of a Republic, where all stood thus far  
Upon equal ground; that we were brothers all  
In honour, as in one community,  
Scholars and gentlemen; where, furthermore,  
Distinction open lay to all that came,  
And wealth and titles were in less esteem  
Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry.  
Add unto this, subservience from the first  
To presences of God's mysterious power  
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty,  
And fellowship with venerable books,  
To sanction the proud workings of the soul,  
And mountain liberty. It could not be  
But that one tutored thus should look with awe  
Upon the faculties of man, receive  
Gladly the highest promises, and hail,  
As best, the government of equal rights  
And individual worth. And hence, O Friend!  
If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced  
Less than might well befit my youth, the cause  
In part lay here, that unto me the events  
Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,  
A gift that was come rather late than soon.

## THE PRELUDE

No wonder, then, if advocates like these,  
Inflamed by passion, blind with prejudice,  
And stung with injury, at this riper day,  
Were impotent to make my hopes put on  
The shape of theirs, my understanding bend  
In honour to their honour: zeal, which yet  
Had slumbered, now in opposition burst  
Forth like a Polar summer: every word  
They uttered was a dart, by counter-winds  
Blown back upon themselves; their reason seemed  
Confusion-stricken by a higher power  
Than human understanding, their discourse  
Maimed, spiritless; and, in their weakness strong,  
I triumphed.

Meantime, day by day, the roads  
Were crowded with the bravest youth of France,  
And all the promptest of her spirits, linked  
In gallant soldiership, and posting on  
To meet the war upon her frontier bounds.  
Yet at this very moment do tears start  
Into mine eyes: I do not say I weep —  
I wept not then, — but tears have dimmed my sight,  
In memory of the farewells of that time,  
Domestic severings, female fortitude  
At dearest separation, patriot love  
And self-devotion, and terrestrial hope,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Encouraged with a martyr's confidence;  
Even files of strangers merely seen but once,  
And for a moment, men from far with sound  
Of music, martial tunes, and banners spread,  
Entering the city, here and there a face,  
Or person, singled out among the rest,  
Yet still a stranger and beloved as such;  
Even by these passing spectacles my heart  
Was oftentimes uplifted, and they seemed  
Arguments sent from Heaven to prove the cause  
Good, pure, which no one could stand up against,  
Who was not lost, abandoned, selfish, proud,  
Mean, miserable, wilfully depraved,  
Hater perverse of equity and truth.

Among that band of Officers was one,  
Already hinted at, of other mould —  
A patriot, thence rejected by the rest,  
And with an oriental loathing spurned,  
As of a different cast. A meeker man  
Than this lived never, nor a more benign,  
Meek though enthusiastic. Injuries  
Made *him* more gracious, and his nature then  
Did breathe its sweetness out most sensibly,  
As aromatic flowers on Alpine turf,  
When foot hath crushed them. He through the events

## THE PRELUDE

Of that great change wandered in perfect faith,  
As through a book, an old romance, or tale  
Of Fairy, or some dream of actions wrought  
Behind the summer clouds. By birth he ranked  
With the most noble, but unto the poor  
Among mankind he was in service bound,  
As by some tie invisible, oaths professed  
To a religious order. Man he loved  
As man; and, to the mean and the obscure,  
And all the homely in their homely works,  
Transferred a courtesy which had no air  
Of condescension; but did rather seem  
A passion and a gallantry, like that]  
Which he, a soldier, in his idler day  
Had paid to woman: somewhat vain he was,  
Or seemed so, yet it was not vanity,  
But fondness, and a kind of radiant joy  
Diffused around him, while he was intent  
On works of love or freedom, or revolved  
Complacently the progress of a cause,  
Whereof he was a part: yet this was meek  
And placid, and took nothing from the man  
That was delightful. Oft in solitude  
With him did I discourse about the end  
Of civil government, and its wisest forms;  
Of ancient loyalty, and chartered rights,



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Custom and habit, novelty and change;  
Of self-respect, and virtue in the few  
For patrimonial honour set apart,  
And ignorance in the labouring multitude.  
For he, to all intolerance indisposed,  
Balanced these contemplations in his mind;  
And I, who at that time was scarcely dipped  
Into the turmoil, bore a sounder judgment  
Than later days allowed; carried about me,  
With less alloy to its integrity,  
The experience of past ages, as, through help  
Of books and common life, it makes sure way  
To youthful minds, by objects over near  
Not pressed upon, nor dazzled or misled  
By struggling with the crowd for present ends.

But though not deaf, nor obstinate to find  
Error without excuse upon the side  
Of them who strove against us, more delight  
We took, and let this freely be confessed,  
In painting to ourselves the miseries  
Of royal courts, and that voluptuous life  
Unfeeling, where the man who is of soul  
The meanest strives the most; where dignity,  
True personal dignity, abideth not;  
A light, a cruel, and vain world cut off

## THE PRELUDE

From the natural inlets of just sentiment,  
From lowly sympathy and chastening truth;  
Where good and evil interchange their names,  
And thirst for bloody spoils abroad is paired  
With vice at home. We added dearest themes —  
Man and his noble nature, as it is  
The gift which God has placed within his power,  
His blind desires and steady faculties  
Capable of clear truth, the one to break  
Bondage, the other to build liberty  
On firm foundations, making social life,  
Through knowledge spreading and imperishable,  
As just in regulation, and as pure  
As individual in the wise and good.

We summoned up the honourable deeds  
Of ancient Story, thought of each bright spot,  
That would be found in all recorded time,  
Of truth preserved and error passed away;  
Of single spirits that catch the flame from Heaven,  
And how the multitudes of men will feed  
And fan each other; thought of sects, how keen  
They are to put the appropriate nature on,  
Triumphant over every obstacle  
Of custom, language, country, love, or hate,  
And what they do and suffer for their creed;

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

How far they travel, and how long endure;  
How quickly mighty Nations have been formed,  
From least beginnings; how, together locked  
By new opinions, scattered tribes have made  
One body, spreading wide as clouds in heaven.  
To aspirations then of our own minds  
Did we appeal; and, finally, beheld  
A living confirmation of the whole  
Before us, in a people from the depth  
Of shameful imbecility uprisen,  
Fresh as the morning star. Elate we looked  
Upon their virtues; saw, in rudest men,  
Self-sacrifice the firmest; generous love,  
And continence of mind, and sense of right,  
Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.

Oh, sweet it is, in academic groves,  
Or such retirement, Friend! as we have known  
In the green dales beside our Rotha's stream,  
Greta, or Derwent, or some nameless rill,  
To ruminate, with interchange of talk,  
On rational liberty, and hope in man,  
Justice and peace. But far more sweet such toil —  
Toil, say I, for it leads to thoughts abstruse —  
If nature then be standing on the brink  
Of some great trial, and we hear the voice

## THE PRELUDE

Of one devoted, — one whom circumstance  
Hath called upon to embody his deep sense  
In action, give it outwardly a shape,  
And that of benediction, to the world.  
Then doubt is not, and truth is more than truth, —  
A hope it is, and a desire; a creed  
Of zeal, by an authority Divine  
Sanctioned, of danger, difficulty, or death.  
Such conversation, under Attic shades,  
Did Dion hold with Plato; ripened thus  
For a Deliverer's glorious task, — and such  
He, on that ministry already bound,  
Held with Eudemus and Timonides,  
Surrounded by adventurers in arms,  
When those two vessels with their daring freight,  
For the Sicilian Tyrant's overthrow,  
Sailed from Zacynthus, — philosophic war,  
Led by Philosophers. With harder fate,  
Though like ambition, such was he, O Friend!  
Of whom I speak. So Beaupuis (let the name  
Stand near the worthiest of Antiquity)  
Fashioned his life; and many a long discourse,  
With like persuasion honoured, we maintained:  
He, on his part, accoutred for the worst,  
He perished fighting, in supreme command,  
Upon the borders of the unhappy Loire,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

For liberty, against deluded men,  
His fellow-countrymen; and yet most blessed  
In this, that he the fate of later times  
Lived not to see, nor what we now behold,  
Who have as ardent hearts as he had then.

Along that very Loire, with festal mirth  
Resounding at all hours, and innocent yet  
Of civil slaughter, was our frequent walk;  
Or in wide forests of continuous shade,  
Lofty and over-arched, with open space  
Beneath the trees, clear footing many a mile —  
A solemn region. Oft amid those haunts,  
From earnest dialogues I slipped in thought,  
And let remembrance steal to other times,  
When, o'er those interwoven roots, moss-clad,  
And smooth as marble or a waveless sea,  
Some Hermit, from his cell forth-strayed, might pace  
In sylvan meditation undisturbed;  
As on the pavement of a Gothic church  
Walks a lone Monk, when service hath expired,  
In peace and silence. But if e'er was heard, —  
Heard, though unseen, — a devious traveller,  
Retiring or approaching from afar  
With speed and echoes loud of trampling hoofs  
From the hard floor reverberated, then

## THE PRELUDE

It was Angelica thundering through the woods  
Upon her palfrey, or that gentle maid  
Erminia, fugitive as fair as she.  
Sometimes methought I saw a pair of knights  
Joust underneath the trees, that as in storm  
Rocked high above their heads; anon, the din  
Of boisterous merriment, and music's roar,  
In sudden proclamation, burst from haunt  
Of Satyrs in some viewless glade, with dance  
Rejoicing o'er a female in the midst,  
A mortal beauty, their unhappy thrall.  
The width of those huge forests, unto me  
A novel scene, did often in this way  
Master my fancy while I wandered on  
With that revered companion. And sometimes —  
When to a convent in a meadow green,  
By a brook-side, we came, a roofless pile,  
And not by reverential touch of Time  
Dismantled, but by violence abrupt —  
In spite of those heart-bracing colloquies,  
In spite of real fervour, and of that  
Less genuine and wrought up within myself —  
I could not but bewail a wrong so harsh,  
And for the Matin-bell to sound no more  
Grieved, and the twilight taper, and the cross  
High on the topmost pinnacle, a sign



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

(How welcome to the weary traveller's eyes!)  
Of hospitality and peaceful rest.  
And when the partner of those varied walks  
Pointed upon occasion to the site  
Of Romorentin, home of ancient kings,  
To the imperial edifice of Blois,  
Or to that rural castle, name now slipped  
From my remembrance, where a lady lodged,  
By the first Francis wooed, and bound to him  
In chains of mutual passion, from the tower,  
As a tradition of the country tells,  
Practised to commune with her royal knight  
By cressets and love-beacons, intercourse  
'Twixt her high-seated residence and his  
Far off at Chambord on the plain beneath;  
Even here, though less than with the peaceful house  
Religious, 'mid those frequent monuments  
Of Kings, their vices and their better deeds,  
Imagination, potent to inflame  
At times with virtuous wrath and noble scorn,  
Did also often mitigate the force  
Of civic prejudice, the bigotry,  
So call it, of a youthful patriot's mind;  
And on these spots with many gleams I looked  
Of chivalrous delight. Yet not the less,  
Hatred of absolute rule, where will of one

## THE PRELUDE

Is law for all, and of that barren pride  
In them who, by immunities unjust,  
Between the sovereign and the people stand,  
His helper and not theirs, laid stronger hold  
Daily upon me, mixed with pity too  
And love; for where hope is, there love will be  
For the abject multitude. And when we chanced  
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,  
Who crept along fitting her languid gait  
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord  
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane  
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands  
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood  
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend  
In agitation said, "'T is against *that*  
That we are fighting," I with him believed  
That a benignant spirit was abroad  
Which might not be withstood, that poverty  
Abject as this would in a little time  
Be found no more, that we should see the earth  
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense  
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,  
All institutes for ever blotted out  
That legalised exclusion, empty pomp  
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power  
Whether by edict of the one or few;

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

And finally, as sum and crown of all,  
Should see the people having a strong hand  
In framing their own laws; whence better days  
To all mankind. But, these things set apart,  
Was not this single confidence enough  
To animate the mind that ever turned  
A thought to human welfare? That henceforth  
Captivity by mandate without law  
Should cease; and open accusation lead  
To sentence in the hearing of the world,  
And open punishment, if not the air  
Be free to breathe in, and the heart of man  
Dread nothing. From this height I shall not  
stoop

To humbler matter that detained us oft  
In thought or conversation, public acts,  
And public persons, and emotions wrought  
Within the breast, as ever-varying winds  
Of record or report swept over us;  
But I might here, instead, repeat a tale,<sup>12</sup>  
Told by my Patriot friend, of sad events,  
That prove to what low depth had struck the  
roots,

How widely spread the boughs, of that old tree  
Which, as a deadly mischief, and a foul  
And black dishonour, France was weary of.

## THE PRELUDE

Oh, happy time of youthful lovers, (thus  
The story might begin,) oh, balmy time,  
In which a love-knot, on a lady's brow,  
Is fairer than the fairest star in Heaven!  
So might — and with that prelude *did* begin  
The record; and, in faithful verse, was given  
The doleful sequel.

But our little bark  
On a strong river boldly hath been launched;  
And from the driving current should we turn  
To loiter wilfully within a creek,  
Howe'er attractive, Fellow voyager!  
Would'st thou not chide? Yet deem not my pains  
lost:

For Vaudracour and Julia (so were named  
The ill-fated pair) in that plain tale will draw  
Tears from the hearts of others, when their own  
Shall beat no more. Thou, also, there may'st read,  
At leisure, how the enamoured youth was driven,  
By public power abased, to fatal crime,  
Nature's rebellion against monstrous law;  
How, between heart and heart, oppression thrust  
Her mandates, severing whom true love had joined,  
Harassing both; until he sank and pressed  
The couch his fate had made for him; supine,  
Save when the stings of viperous remorse,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Trying their strength, enforced him to start up,  
Aghast and prayerless. Into a deep wood  
He fled, to shun the haunts of human kind;  
There dwelt, weakened in spirit more and more;  
Nor could the voice of Freedom, which through France  
Full speedily resounded, public hope,  
Or personal memory of his own worst wrongs,  
Rouse him; but, hidden in those gloomy shades,  
His days he wasted, — an imbecile mind.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK TENTH

### RESIDENCE IN FRANCE (*continued*)

It was a beautiful and silent day  
That overspread the countenance of earth,  
Then fading with unusual quietness, —  
A day as beautiful as e'er was given  
To soothe regret, though deepening what it soothed,  
When by the gliding Loire I paused, and cast  
Upon his rich domains, vineyard and tilth,  
Green meadow-ground, and many-coloured woods,  
Again, and yet again, a farewell look;  
Then from the quiet of that scene passed on,  
Bound to the fierce Metropolis. From his throne  
The King had fallen, and that invading host —  
Presumptuous cloud, on whose black front was  
written

The tender mercies of the dismal wind  
That bore it — on the plains of Liberty  
Had burst innocuous. Say in bolder words,  
They — who had come elate as eastern hunters  
Banded beneath the Great Mogul, when he  
Erewhile went forth from Agra or Lahore,  
Rajahs and Omrahs in his train, intent  
To drive their prey enclosed within a ring  
Wide as a province, but, the signal given,



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Before the point of the life-threatening spear  
Narrowing itself by moments — they, rash men,  
Had seen the anticipated quarry turned  
Into avengers, from whose wrath they fled  
In terror. Disappointment and dismay  
Remained for all whose fancies had run wild  
With evil expectations; confidence  
And perfect triumph for the better cause.

The State — as if to stamp the final seal  
On her security, and to the world  
Show what she was, a high and fearless soul,  
Exulting in defiance, or heart-stung  
By sharp resentment, or belike to taunt  
With spiteful gratitude the baffled League,  
That had stirred up her slackening faculties  
To a new transition — when the King was crushed,  
Spared not the empty throne, and in proud haste  
Assumed the body and venerable name  
Of a Republic. Lamentable crimes,  
'T is true, had gone before this hour, dire work  
Of massacre, in which the senseless sword  
Was prayed to as a judge; but these were past,  
Earth free from them for ever, as was thought, —  
Ephemeral monsters, to be seen but once!  
Things that could only show themselves and die.

## THE PRELUDE

Cheered with this hope, to Paris I returned,  
And ranged, with ardour heretofore unfelt,  
The spacious city, and in progress passed  
The prison where the unhappy Monarch lay,  
Associate with his children and his wife  
In bondage; and the palace, lately stormed  
With roar of cannon by a furious host.  
I crossed the square (an empty area then!)  
Of the Carrousel, where so late had lain  
The dead, upon the dying heaped, and gazed  
On this and other spots, as doth a man  
Upon a volume whose contents he knows  
Are memorable, but from him locked up,  
Being written in a tongue he cannot read,  
So that he questions the mute leaves with pain,  
And half upbraids their silence. But that night  
I felt most deeply in what world I was,  
What ground I trod on, and what air I breathed.  
High was my room and lonely, near the roof  
Of a large mansion or hotel, a lodge  
That would have pleased me in more quiet times;  
Nor was it wholly without pleasure then.  
With unextinguished taper I kept watch,  
Reading at intervals; the fear gone by  
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.  
I thought of those September massacres,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Divided from me by one little month,  
Saw them and touched: the rest was conjured up  
From tragic fictions or true history,  
Remembrances and dim admonishments.  
The horse is taught his manage, and no star  
Of wildest course but treads back his own steps;  
For the spent hurricane the air provides  
As fierce a successor; the tide retreats  
But to return out of its hiding-place  
In the great deep; all things have second birth;  
The earthquake is not satisfied at once;  
And in this way I wrought upon myself,  
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,  
To the whole city, "Sleep no more." The trance  
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth;  
But vainly comments of a calmer mind  
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.  
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,  
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,  
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.

With early morning towards the Palace-walk  
Of Orleans eagerly I turned: as yet  
The streets were still; not so those long Arcades;  
There, 'mid a peal of ill-matched sounds and cries,  
That greeted me on entering, I could hear

## THE PRELUDE

Shrill voices from the hawkers in the throng,  
Bawling, "Denunciation of the Crimes  
Of Maximilian Robespierre"; the hand,  
Prompt as the voice, held forth a printed speech,  
The same that had been recently pronounced,  
When Robespierre, not ignorant for what mark  
Some words of indirect reproof had been  
Intended, rose in hardihood, and dared  
The man who had an ill surmise of him  
To bring his charge in openness; whereat,  
When a dead pause ensued, and no one stirred,  
In silence of all present, from his seat  
Louvet walked single through the avenue,  
And took his station in the Tribune, saying,  
"I, Robespierre, accuse thee!" Well is known  
The inglorious issue of that charge, and how  
He, who had launched the startling thunderbolt,  
The one bold man, whose voice the attack had sounded,  
Was left without a follower to discharge  
His perilous duty, and retire lamenting  
That Heaven's best aid is wasted upon men  
Who to themselves are false.

But these are things  
Of which I speak, only as they were storm  
Or sunshine to my individual mind,  
No further. Let me then relate that now —

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

In some sort seeing with my proper eyes  
That Liberty, and Life, and Death, would soon  
To the remotest corners of the land  
Lie in the arbitrement of those who ruled  
The capital City; what was struggled for,  
And by what combatants victory must be won;  
The indecision on their part whose aim  
Seemed best, and the straightforward path of those  
Who in attack or in defence were strong  
Through their impiety — my inmost soul  
Was agitated; yea, I could almost  
Have prayed that throughout earth upon all men,  
By patient exercise of reason made  
Worthy of liberty, all spirits filled  
With zeal expanding in Truth's holy light,  
The gift of tongues might fall, and power arrive  
From the four quarters of the winds to do  
For France, what without help she could not do,  
A work of honour; think not that to this  
I added, work of safety: from all doubt  
Or trepidation for the end of things  
Far was I, far as angels are from guilt.

Yet did I grieve, nor only grieved, but thought  
Of opposition and of remedies:  
An insignificant stranger and obscure,

## THE PRELUDE

And one, moreover, little graced with power  
Of eloquence even in my native speech,  
And all unfit for tumult or intrigue,  
Yet would I at this time with willing heart  
Have undertaken for a cause so great  
Service however dangerous. I revolved,  
How much the destiny of Man had still  
Hung upon single persons; that there was,  
Transcendent to all local patrimony,  
One nature, as there is one sun in heaven;  
That objects, even as they are great, thereby  
Do come within the reach of humblest eyes;  
That Man is only weak through his mistrust  
And want of hope where evidence divine  
Proclaims to him that hope should be most sure;  
Nor did the inexperience of my youth  
Preclude conviction, that a spirit strong  
In hope, and trained to noble aspirations,  
A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself,  
Is for Society's unreasoning herd  
A domineering instinct, serves at once  
For way and guide, a fluent receptacle  
That gathers up each petty straggling rill  
And vein of water, glad to be rolled on  
In safe obedience; that a mind, whose rest  
Is where it ought to be, in self-restraint,



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

In circumspection and simplicity,  
Falls rarely in entire discomfiture  
Below its aim, or meets with, from without,  
A treachery that foils it or defeats;  
And, lastly, if the means on human will,  
Frail human will, dependent should betray  
Him who too boldly trusted them, I felt  
That 'mid the loud distractions of the world  
A sovereign voice subsists within the soul,  
Arbiter undisturbed of right and wrong,  
Of life and death, in majesty severe  
Enjoining, as may best promote the aims  
Of truth and justice, either sacrifice,  
From whatsoever region of our cares  
Or our infirm affections Nature pleads,  
Earnest and blind, against the stern decree.

On the other side, I called to mind those truths  
That are the commonplaces of the schools —  
(A theme for boys, too hackneyed for their sires,) —  
Yet, with a revelation's liveliness,  
In all their comprehensive bearings known  
And visible to philosophers of old,  
Men who, to business of the world untrained,  
Lived in the shade; and to Harmodius known  
And his compeer Aristogiton, known

## THE PRELUDE

To Brutus — that tyrannic power is weak,  
Hath neither gratitude, nor faith, nor love,  
Nor the support of good or evil men  
To trust in; that the godhead which is ours  
Can never utterly be charmed or stilled;  
That nothing hath a natural right to last  
But equity and reason; that all else  
Meets foes irreconcilable, and at best  
Lives only by variety of disease.

Well might my wishes be intense, my thoughts  
Strong and perturbed, not doubting at that time  
But that the virtue of one paramount mind  
Would have abashed those impious crests — have  
                  quelled

Outrage and bloody power, and — in despite  
Of what the People long had been and were  
Through ignorance and false teaching, sadder proof  
Of immaturity, and — in the teeth  
Of desperate opposition from without —  
Have cleared a passage for just government,  
And left a solid birthright to the State,  
Redeemed, according to example given  
By ancient lawgivers.

                                  In this frame of mind,  
Dragged by a chain of harsh necessity,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

So seemed it, — now I thankfully acknowledge,  
Forced by the gracious providence of Heaven, —  
To England I returned, else (though assured  
That I both was and must be of small weight,  
No better than a landsman on the deck  
Of a ship struggling with a hideous storm)  
Doubtless, I should have then made common cause  
With some who perished; haply perished too,  
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering, —  
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,  
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,  
A Poet only to myself, to men  
Useless, and even, beloved Friend! a soul  
To thee unknown!

Twice had the trees let fall  
Their leaves, as often Winter had put on  
His hoary crown, since I had seen the surge  
Beat against Albion's shore, since ear of mine  
Had caught the accents of my native speech  
Upon our native country's sacred ground.  
A patriot of the world, how could I glide  
Into communion with her sylvan shades,  
Erewhile my tuneful haunt? It pleased me more  
To abide in the great City, where I found  
The general air still busy with the stir  
Of that first memorable onset made

## THE PRELUDE

By a strong levy of humanity  
Upon the traffickers in Negro blood;  
Effort which, though defeated, had recalled  
To notice old forgotten principles,  
And through the nation spread a novel heat  
Of virtuous feeling. For myself, I own  
That this particular strife had wanted power  
To rivet my affections; nor did now  
Its unsuccessful issue much excite  
My sorrow; for I brought with me the faith  
That, if France prospered, good men would not long  
Pay fruitless worship to humanity,  
And this most rotten branch of human shame,  
Object, so seemed it, of superfluous pains,  
Would fall together with its parent tree.  
What, then, were my emotions, when in arms  
Britain put forth her free-born strength in league,  
Oh, pity and shame! with those confederate Powers!  
Not in my single self alone I found,  
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,  
Change and subversion from that hour. No shock  
Given to my moral nature had I known  
Down to that very moment; neither lapse  
Nor turn of sentiment that might be named  
A revolution, save at this one time;  
All else was progress on the self-same path

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

On which, with a diversity of pace,  
I had been travelling: this a stride at once  
Into another region. As a light  
And pliant harebell, swinging in the breeze  
On some grey rock — its birth-place — so had I  
Wantoned, fast rooted on the ancient tower  
Of my beloved country, wishing not  
A happier fortune than to wither there:  
Now was I from that pleasant station torn  
And tossed about in whirlwind. I rejoiced,  
Yea, afterwards — truth most painful to record! —  
Exulted, in the triumph of my soul,  
When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown,  
Left without glory on the field, or driven,  
Brave hearts! to shameful flight. It was a grief, —  
Grief call it not, 't was anything but that, —  
A conflict of sensations without name,  
Of which *he* only, who may love the sight  
Of a village steeple, as I do, can judge,  
When, in the congregation bending all  
To their great Father, prayers were offered up,  
Or praises for our country's victories;  
And, 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance  
I only, like an uninvited guest  
Whom no one owned, sate silent, shall I add,  
Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come.

## THE PRELUDE

Oh! much have they to account for, who could tear  
By violence, at one decisive rent,  
From the best youth in England their dear pride,  
Their joy, in England; this, too, at a time  
In which worst losses easily might wean  
The best of names, when patriotic love  
Did of itself in modesty give way,  
Like the Precursor when the Deity  
Is come Whose harbinger he was; a time  
In which apostasy from ancient faith  
Seemed but conversion to a higher creed;  
Withal a season dangerous and wild,  
A time when sage Experience would have snatched  
Flowers out of any hedge-row to compose  
A chaplet in contempt of his grey locks.

When the proud fleet that bears the red-cross flag  
In that unworthy service was prepared  
To mingle, I beheld the vessels lie,  
A brood of gallant creatures, on the deep;  
I saw them in their rest, a sojourner  
Through a whole month of calm and glassy days  
In that delightful island which protects  
Their place of convocation — there I heard,  
Each evening, pacing by the still sea-shore,  
A monitory sound that never failed, —



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

The sunset cannon. While the orb went down  
In the tranquillity of nature, came  
That voice, ill requiem! seldom heard by me  
Without a spirit overcast by dark  
Imaginations, sense of woes to come,  
Sorrow for human kind, and pain of heart.

In France, the men, who, for their desperate ends,  
Had plucked up mercy by the roots, were glad  
Of this new enemy. Tyrants, strong before  
In wicked pleas, were strong as demons now;  
And thus, on every side beset with foes,  
The goaded land waxed mad; the crimes of few  
Spread into madness of the many; blasts  
From hell came sanctified like airs from heaven.  
The sternness of the just, the faith of those  
Who doubted not that Providence had times  
Of vengeful retribution, theirs who throned  
The human Understanding paramount,  
And made of that their God, the hopes of men  
Who were content to barter short-lived pangs  
For a paradise of ages, the blind rage  
Of insolent tempers, the light vanity  
Of intermeddlers, steady purposes  
Of the suspicious, slips of the indiscreet,  
And all the accidents of life — were pressed

## THE PRELUDE

Into one service, busy with one work.  
The Senate stood aghast, her prudence quenched,  
Her wisdom stifled, and her justice scared,  
Her frenzy only active to extol  
Past outrages, and shape the way for new,  
Which no one dared to oppose or mitigate.

Domestic carnage now filled the whole year  
With feast-days; old men from the chimney-nook,  
The maiden from the bosom of her love,  
The mother from the cradle of her babe,  
The warrior from the field — all perished, all —  
Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks,  
Head after head, and never heads enough  
For those that bade them fall. They found their joy,  
They made it proudly, eager as a child,  
(If like desires of innocent little ones  
May with such heinous appetites be compared),  
Pleased in some open field to exercise  
A toy that mimics with revolving wings  
The motion of a wind-mill; though the air  
Do of itself blow fresh, and make the vanes  
Spin in his eyesight, *that* contents him not,  
But with the plaything at arm's length, he sets  
His front against the blast, and runs amain,  
That it may whirl the faster.

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Amid the depth

Of those enormities, even thinking minds  
Forgot, at seasons, whence they had their being,  
Forgot that such a sound was ever heard  
As Liberty upon earth: yet all beneath  
Her innocent authority was wrought,  
Nor could have been, without her blessed name.  
The illustrious wife of Roland, in the hour  
Of her composure, felt that agony,  
And gave it vent in her last words. O Friend!  
It was a lamentable time for man,  
Whether a hope had e'er been his or not:  
A woful time for them whose hopes survived  
The shock; most woful for those few who still  
Were flattered, and had trust in human kind:  
They had the deepest feeling of the grief.  
Meanwhile the Invaders fared as they deserved:  
The Herculean Commonwealth had put forth her arms  
And throttled with an infant godhead's might  
The snakes about her cradle; that was well,  
And as it should be; yet no cure for them  
Whose souls were sick with pain of what would be  
Hereafter brought in charge against mankind.  
Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!  
Were my day-thoughts, — my nights were miserable;  
Through months, through years, long after the last beat

## THE PRELUDE

Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep  
To me came rarely charged with natural gifts,  
Such ghastly visions had I of despair  
And tyranny, and implements of death;  
And innocent victims sinking under fear,  
And momentary hope, and worn-out prayer,  
Each in his separate cell, or penned in crowds  
For sacrifice, and struggling with fond mirth  
And levity in dungeons, where the dust  
Was laid with tears. Then suddenly the scene  
Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled me  
In long orations, which I strove to plead  
Before unjust tribunals, — with a voice  
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,  
Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt  
In the last place of refuge — my own soul.

When I began in youth's delightful prime  
To yield myself to Nature, when that strong  
And holy passion overcame me first,  
Nor day nor night, evening or morn, was free  
From its oppression. But, O Power Supreme!  
Without Whose call this world would cease to  
breathe,  
Who from the fountain of Thy grace dost fill  
The veins that branch through every frame of life,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

Making man what he is, creature divine,  
In single or in social eminence,  
Above the rest raised infinite ascents  
When reason that enables him to be  
Is not sequestered — what a change is here!  
How different ritual for this after-worship,  
What countenance to promote this second love!  
The first was service paid to things which lie  
Guarded within the bosom of thy will.  
Therefore to serve was high beatitude;  
Tumult was therefore gladness, and the fear  
Ennobling, venerable; sleep secure,  
And waking thoughts more rich than happiest  
dreams.

But as the ancient Prophets, borne aloft  
In vision, yet constrained by natural laws  
With them to take a troubled human heart,  
Wanted not consolations, nor a creed  
Of reconciliation, then when they denounced,  
On towns and cities, wallowing in the abyss  
Of their offences, punishment to come;  
Or saw, like other men, with bodily eyes,  
Before them, in some desolated place,  
The wrath consummate and the threat fulfilled;  
So, with devout humility be it said,

## THE PRELUDE

So did a portion of that spirit fall  
On me uplifted from the vantage-ground  
Of pity and sorrow to a state of being  
That through the time's exceeding fierceness saw  
Glimpses of retribution, terrible,  
And in the order of sublime behests:  
But, even if that were not, amid the awe  
Of unintelligible chastisement,  
Not only acquiescences of faith  
Survived, but daring sympathies with power,  
Motions not treacherous or profane, else why  
Within the folds of no ungentle breast  
Their dread vibration to this hour prolonged?  
Wild blasts of music thus could find their way  
Into the midst of turbulent events;  
So that worst tempests might be listened to.  
Then was the truth received into my heart,  
That, under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,  
If from the affliction somewhere do not grow  
Honour which could not else have been, a faith,  
An elevation, and a sanctity,  
If new strength be not given nor old restored,  
The blame is ours, not Nature's. When a taunt  
Was taken up by scoffers in their pride,  
Saying, "Behold the harvest that we reap  
From popular government and equality,"



## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

I clearly saw that neither these nor aught  
Of wild belief engrafted on their names  
By false philosophy had caused the woe,  
But a terrific reservoir of guilt  
And ignorance filled up from age to age,  
That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,  
But burst and spread in deluge through the land.

And as the desert hath green spots, the sea  
Small islands scattered amid stormy waves,  
So *that* disastrous period did not want  
Bright sprinklings of all human excellence,  
To which the silver wands of saints in Heaven  
Might point with rapturous joy. Yet not the less,  
For those examples, in no age surpassed,  
Of fortitude and energy and love,  
And human nature faithful to herself  
Under worst trials, was I driven to think  
Of the glad times when first I traversed France  
A youthful pilgrim; above all reviewed  
That eventide, when under windows bright  
With happy faces and with garlands hung,  
And through a rainbow-arch that spanned the  
street,  
Triumphal pomp for liberty confirmed,  
I paced, a dear companion at my side,

## THE PRELUDE

The town of Arras, whence with promise high  
Issued, on delegation to sustain  
Humanity and right, *that* Robespierre,  
He who thereafter, and in how short time!  
Wielded the sceptre of the Atheist crew.  
When the calamity spread far and wide —  
And this same city, that did then appear  
To outrun the rest in exultation, groaned  
Under the vengeance of her cruel son,  
As Lear reproached the winds — I could almost  
Have quarrelled with that blameless spectacle  
For lingering yet an image in my mind  
To mock me under such a strange reverse.

O Friend! few happier moments have been mine  
Than that which told the downfall of this Tribe  
So dreaded, so abhorred. The day deserves  
A separate record. Over the smooth sands  
Of Leven's ample estuary lay  
My journey, and beneath a genial sun,  
With distant prospect among gleams of sky  
And clouds and intermingling mountain tops,  
In one inseparable glory clad,  
Creatures of one ethereal substance met  
In consistory, like a diadem  
Or crown of burning seraphs as they sit

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

In the empyrean. Underneath that pomp  
Celestial, lay unseen the pastoral vales  
Among whose happy fields I had grown up  
From childhood. On the fulgent spectacle,  
That neither passed away nor changed, I gazed  
Enrapt; but brightest things are wont to draw  
Sad opposites out of the inner heart,  
As even their pensive influence drew from mine.  
How could it otherwise? for not in vain  
That very morning had I turned aside  
To seek the ground where, 'mid a throng of graves,  
An honoured teacher of my youth was laid,  
And on the stone were graven by his desire  
Lines from the churchyard elegy of Gray.  
This faithful guide, speaking from his death-bed,  
Added no farewell to his parting counsel,  
But said to me, "My head will soon lie low";  
And when I saw the turf that covered him,  
After the lapse of full eight years, those words,  
With sound of voice and countenance of the Man,  
Came back upon me, so that some few tears  
Fell from me in my own despite. But now  
I thought, still traversing that widespread plain,  
With tender pleasure of the verses graven  
Upon his tombstone, whispering to myself:  
He loved the Poets, and, if now alive,

## THE PRELUDE

Would have loved me, as one not destitute  
Of promise, nor belying the kind hope  
That he had formed, when I, at his command,  
Began to spin, with toil, my earliest songs.

As I advanced, all that I saw or felt  
Was gentleness and peace. Upon a small  
And rocky island near, a fragment stood,  
(Itself like a sea rock) the low remains  
(With shells encrusted, dark with briny weeds)  
Of a dilapidated structure, once  
A Romish chapel, where the vested priest  
Said matins at the hour that suited those  
Who crossed the sands with ebb of morning tide.  
Not far from that still ruin all the plain  
Lay spotted with a variegated crowd  
Of vehicles and travellers, horse and foot,  
Wading beneath the conduct of their guide  
In loose procession through the shallow stream  
Of inland waters; the great sea meanwhile  
Heaved at safe distance, far retired. I paused,  
Longing for skill to paint a scene so bright  
And cheerful, but the foremost of the band  
As he approached, no salutation given  
In the familiar language of the day,  
Cried, "Robespierre is dead!" nor was a doubt,

## RESIDENCE IN FRANCE

After strict question, left within my mind  
That he and his supporters all were fallen.

Great was my transport, deep my gratitude  
To everlasting Justice, by this fiat  
Made manifest. "Come now, ye golden times,"  
Said I forth-pouring on those open sands  
A hymn of triumph: "as the morning comes  
From out the bosom of the night, come ye:  
Thus far our trust is verified; behold!  
They who with clumsy desperation brought  
A river of Blood, and preached that nothing else  
Could cleanse the Augean stable, by the might  
Of their own helper have been swept away;  
Their madness stands declared and visible;  
Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and earth  
March firmly towards righteousness and peace." —  
Then schemes I framed more calmly, when and how  
The madding factions might be tranquillised,  
And how through hardships manifold and long  
The glorious renovation would proceed.  
Thus interrupted by uneasy bursts  
Of exultation, I pursued my way  
Along that very shore which I had skimmed  
In former days, when — spurring from the Vale  
Of Nightshade, and St. Mary's mouldering fane,

## THE PRELUDE

And the stone abbot, after circuit made  
In wantonness of heart, a joyous band  
Of schoolboys hastening to their distant home  
Along the margin of the moonlight sea —  
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.



# FRANCE

## BOOK ELEVENTH

### FRANCE (*concluded*)

FROM that time forth, Authority in France  
Put on a milder face; Terror had ceased,  
Yet everything was wanting that might give  
Courage to them who looked for good by light  
Of rational Experience, for the shoots  
And hopeful blossoms of a second spring:  
Yet, in me, confidence was unimpaired;  
The Senate's language, and the public acts  
And measures of the Government, though both  
Weak, and of heartless omen, had not power  
To daunt me; in the People was my trust:  
And, in the virtues which mine eyes had seen,  
I knew that wound external could not take  
Life from the young Republic; that new foes  
Would only follow, in the path of shame,  
Their brethren, and her triumphs be in the end  
Great, universal, irresistible.  
This intuition led me to confound  
One victory with another, higher far, —  
Triumphs of unambitious peace at home,  
And noiseless fortitude. Beholding still  
Resistance strong as heretofore, I thought  
That what was in degree the same was likewise

## THE PRELUDE

The same in quality, — that, as the worse  
Of the two spirits then at strife remained  
Untired, the better, surely, would preserve  
The heart that first had roused him. Youth maintains  
In all conditions of society,  
Communion more direct and intimate  
With Nature, — hence, oftentimes, with reason too —  
Than age or manhood, even. To Nature then,  
Power had reverted: habit, custom, law,  
Had left an interregnum's open space  
For *her* to move about in, uncontrolled.  
Hence could I see how Babel-like their task,  
Who, by the recent deluge stupified,  
With their whole souls went culling from the day  
Its petty promises, to build a tower  
For their own safety; laughed with my compeers  
At gravest heads, by enmity to France  
Distempered, till they found, in every blast  
Forced from the street-disturbing newsman's horn,  
For her great cause record or prophecy  
Of utter ruin. How might we believe  
That wisdom could, in any shape, come near  
Men clinging to delusions so insane?  
And thus, experience proving that no few  
Of our opinions had been just, we took  
Like credit to ourselves where less was due,

## FRANCE

And thought that other notions were as sound,  
Yea, could not but be right, because we saw  
That foolish men opposed them.

To a strain

More animated I might here give way,  
And tell, since juvenile errors are my theme,  
What in those days, through Britain, was performed  
To turn *all* judgments out of their right course;  
But this is passion over-near ourselves,  
Reality too close and too intense,  
And intermixed with something, in my mind,  
Of scorn and condemnation personal,  
That would profane the sanctity of verse.  
Our Shepherds, this say merely, at that time  
Acted, or seemed at least to act, like men  
Thirsting to make the guardian crook of law  
A tool of murder; they who ruled the State —  
Though with such awful proof before their eyes  
That he, who would sow death, reaps death, or  
worse,

And can reap nothing better — child-like longed  
To imitate, not wise enough to avoid;  
Or left (by mere timidity betrayed)  
The plain straight road, for one no better chosen  
Than if their wish had been to undermine  
Justice, and make an end of Liberty.

## THE PRELUDE

But from these bitter truths I must return  
To my own history. It hath been told  
That I was led to take an eager part  
In arguments of civil polity,  
Abruptly, and indeed before my time:  
I had approached, like other youths, the shield  
Of human nature from the golden side,  
And would have fought, even to the death, to attest  
The quality of the metal which I saw.  
What there is best in individual man,  
Of wise in passion, and sublime in power,  
Benevolent in small societies,  
And great in large ones, I had oft revolved,  
Felt deeply, but not thoroughly understood  
By reason: nay, far from it; they were yet,  
As cause was given me afterwards to learn,  
Not proof against the injuries of the day;  
Lodged only at the sanctuary's door,  
Not safe within its bosom. Thus prepared,  
And with such general insight into evil,  
And of the bounds which sever it from good,  
As books and common intercourse with life  
Must needs have given — to the inexperienced mind,  
When the world travels in a beaten road,  
Guide faithful as is needed — I began  
To meditate with ardour on the rule

## FRANCE

And management of nations; what it is  
And ought to be; and strove to learn how far  
Their power or weakness, wealth or poverty,  
Their happiness or misery, depends  
Upon their laws, and fashion of the State.

<sup>13</sup> O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!  
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood  
Upon our side, us who were strong in love!  
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven! O times,  
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance!  
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,  
When most intent on making of herself  
A prime enchantress — to assist the work,  
Which then was going forward in her name!  
Not favoured spots alone, but the whole Earth,  
The beauty wore of promise — that which sets  
(As at some moments might not be unfelt  
Among the bowers of Paradise itself)  
The budding rose above the rose full blown.  
What temper at the prospect did not wake  
To happiness unthought of? The inert  
Were roused, and lively natures rapt away!

## THE PRELUDE

They who had fed their childhood upon dreams,  
The play-fellows of fancy, who had made  
All powers of swiftness, subtilty, and strength  
Their ministers, — who in lordly wise had stirred  
Among the grandest objects of the sense,  
And dealt with whatsoever they found there  
As if they had within some lurking right  
To wield it; — they, too, who of gentle mood  
Had watched all gentle motions, and to these  
Had fitted their own thoughts, schemers more mild,  
And in the region of their peaceful selves; —  
Nor was it that *both* found, the meek and lofty  
Did both find, helpers to their hearts' desire,  
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish, —  
Were called upon to exercise their skill,  
Not in Utopia, — subterranean fields, —  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, — the place where, in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all!

Why should I not confess that Earth was then  
To me, what an inheritance, new-fallen,  
Seems, when the first time visited, to one  
Who thither comes to find in it his home?  
He walks about and looks upon the spot



## FRANCE

With cordial transport, moulds it and remoulds,  
And is half-pleased with things that are amiss,  
'T will be such joy to see them disappear.

An active partisan, I thus convoked  
From every object pleasant circumstance  
To suit my ends; I moved among mankind  
With genial feelings still predominant;  
When erring, erring on the better part,  
And in the kinder spirit; placable,  
Indulgent, as not uninformed that men  
See as they have been taught — Antiquity  
Gives rights to error; and aware, no less  
That throwing off oppression must be work  
As well of License as of Liberty;  
And above all — for this was more than all —  
Not caring if the wind did now and then  
Blow keen upon an eminence that gave  
Prospect so large into futurity;  
In brief, a child of Nature, as at first,  
Diffusing only those affections wider  
That from the cradle had grown up with me,  
And losing, in no other way than light  
Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong.

In the main outline, such it might be said  
Was my condition, till with open war

## THE PRELUDE

Britain opposed the liberties of France.  
This threw me first out of the pale of love;  
Soured and corrupted, upwards to the source,  
My sentiments; was not, as hitherto,  
A swallowing up of lesser things in great,  
But change of them into their contraries;  
And thus a way was opened for mistakes  
And false conclusions, in degree as gross,  
In kind more dangerous. What had been a pride,  
Was now a shame; my likings and my loves  
Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry;  
And hence a blow that, in maturer age,  
Would but have touched the judgment, struck more deep  
Into sensations near the heart: meantime,  
As from the first, wild theories were afloat,  
To whose pretensions, sedulously urged,  
I had but lent a careless ear, assured  
That time was ready to set all things right,  
And that the multitude, so long oppressed,  
Would be oppressed no more.

But when events  
Brought less encouragement, and unto these  
The immediate proof of principles no more  
Could be entrusted, while the events themselves,  
Worn out in greatness, stripped of novelty,  
Less occupied the mind, and sentiments

## FRANCE

Could through my understanding's natural growth  
No longer keep their ground, by faith maintained  
Of inward consciousness, and hope that laid  
Her hand upon her object — evidence  
Safer, of universal application, such  
As could not be impeached, was sought elsewhere.

But now, become oppressors in their turn,  
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence  
For one of conquest, losing sight of all  
Which they had struggled for: up mounted now,  
Openly in the eye of earth and heaven,  
The scale of liberty. I read her doom.  
With anger vexed, with disappointment sore,  
But not dismayed, nor taking to the shame  
Of a false prophet. While resentment rose,  
Striving to hide, what nought could heal, the wounds  
Of mortified presumption, I adhered  
More firmly to old tenets, and, to prove  
Their temper, strained them more; and thus, in heat  
Of contest, did opinions every day  
Grow into consequence, till round my mind  
They clung, as if they were its life, nay more,  
The very being of the immortal soul.

This was the time, when, all things tending fast  
To depravation, speculative schemes —

## THE PRELUDE

That promised to abstract the hopes of Man  
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth  
For ever in a purer element —  
Found ready welcome. Tempting region *that*  
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,  
Where passions had the privilege to work,  
And never hear the sound of their own names.  
But, speaking more in charity, the dream  
Flattered the young, pleased with extremes, nor least  
With that which makes our Reason's naked self  
The object of its fervour. What delight!  
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,  
To look through all the frailties of the world,  
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off  
Infirmities of nature, time, and place,  
Build social upon personal Liberty,  
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws,  
Superior, magisterially adopts  
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed  
Upon an independent intellect.  
Thus expectation rose again; thus hope,  
From her first ground expelled, grew proud once more.  
Oft, as my thoughts were turned to human kind,  
I scorned indifference; but, inflamed with thirst  
Of a secure intelligence, and sick  
Of other longing, I pursued what seemed

## FRANCE

A more exalted nature; wished that Man  
Should start out of his earthy, worm-like state,  
And spread abroad the wings of Liberty,  
Lord of himself, in undisturbed delight —  
A noble aspiration! *yet* I feel  
(Sustained by worthier as by wiser thoughts)  
The aspiration, nor shall ever cease  
To feel it; — but return we to our course.

Enough, 't is true — could such a plea excuse  
Those aberrations — had the clamorous friends  
Of ancient Institutions said and done  
To bring disgrace upon their very names;  
Disgrace, of which, custom and written law,  
And sundry moral sentiments as props  
Or emanations of those institutes,  
Too justly bore a part. A veil had been  
Uplifted; why deceive ourselves? in sooth,  
'T was even so; and sorrow for the man  
Who either had not eyes wherewith to see,  
Or, seeing, had forgotten! A strong shock  
Was given to old opinions; all men's minds  
Had felt its power, and mine was both let loose,  
Let loose and goaded. After what hath been  
Already said of patriotic love,  
Suffice it here to add, that, somewhat stern

## THE PRELUDE

In temperament, withal a happy man,  
And therefore bold to look on painful things,  
Free likewise of the world, and thence more bold,  
I summoned my best skill, and toiled, intent  
To anatomise the frame of social life;  
Yea, the whole body of society  
Searched to its heart. Share with me, Friend! the wish  
That some dramatic tale, endued with shapes  
Livelier, and flinging out less guarded words  
Than suit the work we fashion, might set forth  
What then I learned, or think I learned, of truth,  
And the errors into which I fell, betrayed  
By present objects, and by reasonings false  
From their beginnings, inasmuch as drawn  
Out of a heart that had been turned aside  
From Nature's way by outward accidents,  
And which was thus confounded, more and more  
Misguided, and misguiding. So I fared,  
Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,  
Like culprits to the bar; calling the mind,  
Suspiciously, to establish in plain day  
Her titles and her honours; now believing,  
Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed  
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground  
Of obligation, what the rule and whence  
The sanction; till, demanding formal *proof*,



## FRANCE

And seeking it in every thing, I lost  
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,  
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,  
Yielded up moral questions in despair.

This was the crisis of that strong disease,  
This the soul's last and lowest ebb; I drooped,  
Deeming our blessèd reason of least use  
Where wanted most: "The lordly attributes  
Of will and choice," I bitterly exclaimed,  
"What are they but a mockery of a Being  
Who hath in no concerns of his a test  
Of good and evil; knows not what to fear  
Or hope for, what to covet or to shun;  
And who, if those could be discerned, would yet  
Be little profited, would see, and ask  
Where is the obligation to enforce?  
And, to acknowledged law rebellious, still,  
As selfish passion urged, would act amiss;  
The dupe of folly, or the slave of crime."

Depressed, bewildered thus, I did not walk  
With scoffers, seeking light and gay revenge  
From indiscriminate laughter, nor sate down  
In reconciliation with an utter waste  
Of intellect; such sloth I could not brook,

## THE PRELUDE

(Too well I loved, in that my spring of life,  
Pains-taking thoughts, and truth, their dear reward)  
But turned to abstract science, and there sought  
Work for the reasoning faculty enthroned  
Where the disturbances of space and time —  
Whether in matters various, properties  
Inherent, or from human will and power  
Derived — find no admission. Then it was —  
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good! —  
That the belovèd Sister in whose sight  
Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice  
Of sudden admonition — like a brook  
That did but *cross* a lonely road, and now  
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,  
Companion never lost through many a league —  
Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
With my true self; for, though bedimmed and changed  
Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed  
Than as a clouded and a waning moon:  
She whispered still that brightness would return;  
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,  
And that alone, my office upon earth;  
And, lastly, as hereafter will be shown,  
If willing audience fail not, Nature's self,  
By all varieties of human love

## FRANCE

Assisted, led me back through opening day  
To those sweet counsels between head and heart  
Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with  
peace,

Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,  
Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now  
In the catastrophe (for so they dream,  
And nothing less), when, finally to close  
And seal up all the gains of France, a Pope  
Is summoned in, to crown an Emperor —  
This last opprobrium, when we see a people,  
That once looked up in faith, as if to Heaven  
For manna, take a lesson from the dog  
Returning to his vomit; when the sun  
That rose in splendour, was alive, and moved  
In exultation with a living pomp  
Of clouds — his glory's natural retinue —  
Hath dropped all functions by the gods bestowed,  
And, turned into a gewgaw, a machine,  
Sets like an Opera phantom.

Thus, O Friend!

Through times of honour and through times of shame  
Descending, have I faithfully retraced  
The perturbations of a youthful mind  
Under a long-lived storm of great events —  
A story destined for thy ear, who now,

## THE PRELUDE

Among the fallen of nations, dost abide  
Where Etna, over hill and valley, casts  
His shadow stretching towards Syracuse,  
The city of Timoleon! Righteous Heaven!  
How are the mighty prostrated! They first,  
They first of all that breathe should have awaked  
When the great voice was heard from out the  
                  tombs

Of ancient heroes. If I suffered grief  
For ill-requited France, by many deemed  
A trifle only in her proudest day;  
Have been distressed to think of what she once  
Promised, now is; a far more sober cause  
Thine eyes must see of sorrow in a land,  
To the reanimating influence lost  
Of memory, to virtue lost and hope,  
Though with the wreck of loftier years bestrewn.

But indignation works where hope is not,  
And thou, O Friend! wilt be refreshed. There is  
One great society alone on earth:  
The noble Living and the noble Dead.

Thine be such converse strong and sanative,  
A ladder for thy spirit to reascend  
To health and joy and pure contentedness;

## FRANCE

To me the grief confined, that thou art gone  
From this last spot of earth, where Freedom now  
Stands single in her only sanctuary;  
A lonely wanderer, art gone, by pain  
Compelled and sickness, at this latter day,  
This sorrowful reverse for all mankind.  
I feel for thee, must utter what I feel:  
The sympathies erewhile in part discharged,  
Gather afresh, and will have vent again:  
My own delights do scarcely seem to me  
My own delights; the lordly Alps themselves,  
Those rosy peaks, from which the Morning looks  
Abroad on many nations, are no more  
For me that image of pure gladsomeness  
Which they were wont to be. Through kindred  
scenes,

For purpose, at a time, how different!  
Thou tak'st thy way, carrying the heart and soul  
That Nature gives to Poets, now by thought  
Matured, and in the summer of their strength.  
Oh! wrap him in your shades, ye giant woods,  
On Etna's side; and thou, O flowery field  
Of Enna! is there not some nook of thine,  
From the first play-time of the infant world  
Kept sacred to restorative delight,  
When from afar invoked by anxious love?

## THE PRELUDE

Child of the mountains, among shepherds reared,  
Ere yet familiar with the classic page,  
I learnt to dream of Sicily; and lo,  
The gloom, that, but a moment past, was deepened  
At thy command, at her command gives way;  
A pleasant promise, wafted from her shores,  
Comes o'er my heart: in fancy I behold  
Her seas yet smiling, her once happy vales;  
Nor can my tongue give utterance to a name  
Of note belonging to that honoured isle,  
Philosopher or Bard, Empedocles,  
Or Archimedes, pure abstracted soul!  
That doth not yield a solace to my grief:  
And, O Theocritus,<sup>14</sup> so far have some  
Prevailed among the powers of heaven and earth,  
By their endowments, good or great, that they  
Have had, as thou reportest, miracles  
Wrought for them in old time: yea, not unmoved,  
When thinking on my own beloved friend,  
I hear thee tell how bees with honey fed  
Divine Comates, by his impious lord  
Within a chest imprisoned; how they came  
Laden from blooming grove or flowery field,  
And fed him there, alive, month after month,  
Because the goatherd, blessèd man! had lips  
Wet with the Muses' nectar.



## FRANCE

Thus I soothe

The pensive moments by this calm fire-side,  
And find a thousand bounteous images  
To cheer the thoughts of those I love, and mine.  
Our prayers have been accepted; thou wilt stand  
On Etna's summit, above earth and sea,  
Triumphant, winning from the invaded heavens  
Thoughts without bound, magnificent designs,  
Worthy of poets who attuned their harps  
In wood or echoing cave, for discipline  
Of heroes; or, in reverence to the gods,  
Mid temples, served by sapient priests, and choirs  
Of virgins crowned with roses. Not in vain  
Those temples, where they in their ruins yet  
Survive for inspiration, shall attract  
Thy solitary steps: and on the brink  
Thou wilt recline of pastoral Arethuse;  
Or, if that fountain be in truth no more,  
Then, near some other spring — which, by the  
name  
Thou gratest, willingly deceived —  
I see thee linger a glad votary,  
And not a captive pining for his home.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK TWELFTH

### IMAGINATION AND TASTE, HOW IMPAIRED AND RESTORED

LONG time have human ignorance and guilt  
Detained us, on what spectacles of woe  
Compelled to look, and inwardly oppressed  
With sorrow, disappointment, vexing thoughts,  
Confusion of the judgment, zeal decayed,  
And, lastly, utter loss of hope itself  
And things to hope for! Not with these began  
Our song, and not with these our song must end  
Ye motions of delight, that haunt the sides  
Of the green hills; ye breezes and soft airs,  
Whose subtle intercourse with breathing flowers,  
Feelingly watched, might teach Man's haughty  
race

How without injury to take, to give  
Without offence; ye who, as if to show  
The wondrous influence of power gently used,  
Bend the complying heads of lordly pines,  
And, with a touch, shift the stupendous clouds  
Through the whole compass of the sky; ye brooks,  
Muttering along the stones, a busy noise  
By day, a quiet sound in silent night;  
Ye waves, that out of the great deep steal forth

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE<sup>1</sup>

In a calm hour to kiss the pebbly shore,  
Not mute, and then retire, fearing no storm;  
And you, ye groves, whose ministry it is  
To interpose the covert of your shades,  
Even as a sleep, between the heart of man  
And outward troubles, between man himself,  
Not seldom, and his own uneasy heart:  
Oh! that I had a music and a voice  
Harmonious as your own, that I might tell  
What ye have done for me. The morning shines,  
Nor heedeth Man's perverseness; Spring returns, —  
I saw the Spring return, and could rejoice,  
In common with the children of her love,  
Piping on boughs, or sporting on fresh fields,  
Or boldly seeking pleasure nearer heaven  
On wings that navigate cerulean skies.  
So neither were complacency, nor peace,  
Nor tender yearnings, wanting for my good  
Through these distracted times; in Nature still  
Glorying, I found a counterpoise in her,  
Which, when the spirit of evil reached its height,  
Maintained for me a secret happiness.

This narrative, my Friend! hath chiefly told  
Of intellectual power, fostering love,  
Dispensing truth, and, over men and things,

## THE PRELUDE

Where reason yet might hesitate, diffusing  
Prophetic sympathies of genial faith:  
So was I favoured — such my happy lot —  
Until that natural graciousness of mind  
Gave way to overpressure from the times  
And their disastrous issues. What availed,  
When spells forbade the voyager to land,  
That fragrant notice of a pleasant shore  
Wafted, at intervals, from many a bower  
Of blissful gratitude and fearless love?  
Dare I avow that wish was mine to see,  
And hope that future times *would* surely see,  
The man to come, parted, as by a gulph,  
From him who had been; that I could no more  
Trust the elevation which had made me one  
With the great family that still survives  
To illuminate the abyss of ages past,  
Sage, warrior, patriot, hero; for it seemed  
That their best virtues were not free from taint  
Of something false and weak, that could not stand  
The open eye of Reason. Then I said,  
“Go to the Poets, they will speak to thee  
More perfectly of purer creatures; — yet  
If reason be nobility in man,  
Can aught be more ignoble than the man  
Whom they delight in, blinded as he is

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

By prejudice, the miserable slave  
Of low ambition or distempered love?"

In such strange passion, if I may once more  
Review the past, I warred against myself —  
A bigot to a new idolatry —  
Like a cowled monk who hath forsworn the world,  
Zealously laboured to cut off my heart  
From all the sources of her former strength;  
And as, by simple waving of a wand,  
The wizard instantaneously dissolves  
Palace or grove, even so could I unsoul  
As readily by syllogistic words  
Those mysteries of being which have made,  
And shall continue evermore to make,  
Of the whole human race one brotherhood.

What wonder, then, if, to a mind so far  
Perverted, even the visible Universe  
Fell under the dominion of a taste  
Less spiritual, with microscopic view  
Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world?

O Soul of Nature! excellent and fair!  
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I, too,  
Rejoiced through early youth, before the winds

## THE PRELUDE

And roaring waters, and in lights and shades  
That marched and countermarched about the hills  
In glorious apparition, Powers on whom  
I daily waited, now all eye and now  
All ear; but never long without the heart  
Employed, and man's unfolding intellect:  
O Soul of Nature! that, by laws divine  
Sustained and governed, still dost overflow  
With an impassioned life, what feeble ones  
Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been  
When thou wert in thy strength! Nor this through stroke  
Of human suffering, such as justifies  
Remissness and inaptitude of mind,  
But through presumption; even in pleasure pleased  
Unworthily, disliking here, and there  
Liking; by rules of mimic art transferred  
To things above all art; but more, — for this,  
Although a strong infection of the age,  
Was never much my habit — giving way  
To a comparison of scene with scene,  
Bent overmuch on superficial things,  
Pampering myself with meagre novelties  
Of colour and proportion; to the moods  
Of time and season, to the moral power,  
The affections and the spirit of the place,  
Insensible. Nor only did the love



## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Of sitting thus in judgment interrupt  
My deeper feelings, but another cause,  
More subtle and less easily explained,  
That almost seems inherent in the creature,  
A twofold frame of body and of mind.  
I speak in recollection of a time  
When the bodily eye, in every stage of life  
The most despotic of our senses, gained  
Such strength in *me* as often held my mind  
In absolute dominion. Gladly here,  
Entering upon abstruser argument,  
Could I endeavour to unfold the means  
Which Nature studiously employs to thwart  
This tyranny, summons all the senses each  
To counteract the other, and themselves,  
And makes them all, and the objects with which all  
Are conversant, subservient in their turn  
To the great ends of Liberty and Power.  
But leave we this: enough that my delights  
(Such as they were) were sought insatiably.  
Vivid the transport, vivid though not profound;  
I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,  
Still craving combinations of new forms,  
New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,  
Proud of her own endowments, and rejoiced  
To lay the inner faculties asleep.

## THE PRELUDE

Amid the turns and counterturns, the strife  
And various trials of our complex being,  
As we grow up, such thralldom of that sense  
Seems hard to shun. And yet I knew a maid,  
A young enthusiast, who escaped these bonds;  
Her eye was not the mistress of her heart;  
Far less did rules prescribed by passive taste,  
Or barren intermeddling subtleties,  
Perplex her mind; but, wise as women are  
When genial circumstance hath favoured them,  
She welcomed what was given, and craved no  
more;

Whate'er the scene presented to her view  
That was the best, to that she was attuned  
By her benign simplicity of life,  
And through a perfect happiness of soul,  
Whose variegated feelings were in this  
Sisters, that they were each some new delight.  
Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,  
Could they have known her, would have loved;  
methought

Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,  
That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,  
And everything she looked on, should have had  
An intimation how she bore herself  
Towards them and to all creatures. God delights

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

In such a being; for, her common thoughts  
Are piety, her life is gratitude.

Even like this maid, before I was called forth  
From the retirement of my native hills,  
I loved whate'er I saw: nor lightly loved,  
But most intensely; never dreamt of aught  
More grand, more fair, more exquisitely framed  
Than those few nooks to which my happy feet  
Were limited. I had not at that time  
Lived long enough, nor in the least survived  
The first diviner influence of this world,  
As it appears to unaccustomed eyes.  
Worshipping them among the depth of things,  
As piety ordained, could I submit  
To measured admiration, or to aught  
That should preclude humility and love?  
I felt, observed, and pondered; did not judge,  
Yea, never thought of judging; with the gift  
Of all this glory filled and satisfied.  
And afterwards, when through the gorgeous Alps  
Roaming, I carried with me the same heart:  
In truth, the degradation — howsoe'er  
Induced, effect, in whatsoe'er degree,  
Of custom that prepares a partial scale  
In which the little oft outweighs the great;

## THE PRELUDE

Or any other cause that hath been named;  
Or lastly, aggravated by the times  
And their impassioned sounds, which well might  
make

The milder minstrelsies of rural scenes  
Inaudible — was transient; I had known  
Too forcibly, too early in my life,  
Visitings of imaginative power  
For this to last: I shook the habit off  
Entirely and for ever, and again  
In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,  
A sensitive being, a *creative* soul.

There are in our existence spots of time,  
That with distinct pre-eminence retain  
A renovating virtue, whence — depressed  
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
In trivial occupations, and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse — our minds  
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;  
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,  
That penetrates, enables us to mount,  
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.  
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks  
Among those passages of life that give

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,  
The mind is lord and master — outward sense  
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments  
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date  
From our first childhood. I remember well,  
That once, while yet my inexperienced hand  
Could scarcely hold a bridle, with proud hopes  
I mounted, and we journeyed towards the hills:  
An ancient servant of my father's house  
Was with me, my encourager and guide:  
We had not travelled long, ere some mischance  
Disjoined me from my comrade; and, through fear  
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor  
I led my horse, and, stumbling on, at length  
Came to a bottom, where in former times  
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.  
The gibbet-mast had mouldered down, the bones  
And iron case were gone; but on the turf,  
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,  
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer's  
name.

The monumental letters were inscribed  
In times long past; but still, from year to year  
By superstition of the neighbourhood,  
The grass is cleared away, and to this hour  
The characters are fresh and visible:

## THE PRELUDE

A casual glance had shown them, and I fled,  
Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road:  
Then, reascending the bare common, saw  
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,  
The beacon on the summit, and, more near,  
A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head,  
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way  
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,  
An ordinary sight; but I should need  
Colours and words that are unknown to man,  
To paint the visionary dreariness  
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,  
Invested moorland waste and naked pool,  
The beacon crowning the lone eminence,  
The female and her garments vexed and tossed  
By the strong wind. When, in the blessèd hours  
Of early love, the loved one at my side,  
I roamed, in daily presence of this scene,  
Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,  
And on the melancholy beacon, fell  
A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam;  
And think ye not with radiance more sublime  
For these remembrances, and for the power  
They had left behind? So feeling comes in aid  
Of feeling, and diversity of strength  
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.



## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth  
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see  
In simple childhood something of the base  
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,  
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,  
Else never canst receive. The days gone by  
Return upon me almost from the dawn  
Of life: the hiding-places of man's power  
Open; I would approach them, but they close.  
I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,  
May scarcely see at all; and I would give,  
While yet we may, as far as words can give,  
Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining,  
Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past  
For future restoration. — Yet another  
Of these memorials: —

One Christmas-time,

On the glad eve of its dear holidays,  
Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth  
Into the fields, impatient for the sight  
Of those led palfreys that should bear us home,  
My brothers and myself. There rose a crag,  
That, from the meeting-point of two highways  
Ascending, overlooked them both, far stretched;  
Thither, uncertain on which road to fix  
My expectation, thither I repaired,

## THE PRELUDE

Scout-like, and gained the summit; 't was a day  
Tempestuous, dark, and wild, and on the grass  
I sate half-sheltered by a naked wall;  
Upon my right hand couched a single sheep,  
Upon my left a blasted hawthorn stood;  
With those companions at my side, I watched,  
Straining my eyes intensely, as the mist  
Gave intermitting prospect of the copse  
And plain beneath. Ere we to school returned, —  
That dreary time, — ere we had been ten days  
Sojourners in my father's house, he died;  
And I and my three brothers, orphans then,  
Followed his body to the grave. The event,  
With all the sorrow that it brought, appeared  
A chastisement; and when I called to mind  
That day so lately past, when from the crag  
I looked in such anxiety of hope;  
With trite reflections of morality,  
Yet in the deepest passion, I bowed low  
To God, Who thus corrected my desires;  
And, afterwards, the wind and sleety rain,  
And all the business of the elements,  
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,  
And the bleak music from that old stone wall,  
The noise of wood and water, and the mist  
That on the line of each of those two roads

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Advanced in such indisputable shapes;  
All these were kindred spectacles and sounds  
To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink,  
As at a fountain; and on winter nights,  
Down to this very time, when storm and rain  
Beat on my roof, or, haply, at noon-day,  
While in a grove I walk, whose lofty trees,  
Laden with summer's thickest foliage, rock,  
In a strong wind, some working of the spirit,  
Some inward agitations thence are brought,  
Whate'er their office, whether to beguile  
Thoughts over busy in the course they took,  
Or animate an hour of vacant ease.

# THE PRELUDE

## BOOK THIRTEENTH

### IMAGINATION AND TASTE, HOW IMPAIRED AND RESTORED

*(Concluded)*

FROM Nature doth emotion come, and moods  
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:  
This is her glory; these two attributes  
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.  
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange  
Of peace and excitation, finds in her  
His best and purest friend; from her receives  
That energy by which he seeks the truth,  
From her that happy stillness of the mind  
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

Such benefit the humblest intellects  
Partake of, each in their degree; 't is mine  
To speak, what I myself have known and felt;  
Smooth task! for words find easy way, inspired  
By gratitude, and confidence in truth.  
Long time in search of knowledge did I range  
The field of human life, in heart and mind  
Benighted; but, the dawn beginning now  
To re-appear, 't was proved that not in vain  
I had been taught to reverence a Power  
That is the visible quality and shape

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

And image of right reason; that matures  
Her processes by steadfast laws; gives birth  
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,  
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,  
No vain conceits; provokes to no quick turns  
Of self-applauding intellect; but trains  
To meekness, and exalts by humble faith;  
Holds up before the mind intoxicate  
With present objects, and the busy dance  
Of things that pass away, a temperate show  
Of objects that endure; and by this course  
Disposes her, when over-fondly set  
On throwing off incumbrances, to seek  
In man, and in the frame of social life,  
Whate'er there is desirable and good  
Of kindred permanence, unchanged in form  
And function, or, through strict vicissitude  
Of life and death, revolving. Above all  
Were re-established now those watchful thoughts  
Which, seeing little worthy or sublime  
In what the Historian's pen so much delights  
To blazon — power and energy detached  
From moral purpose — early tutored me  
To look with feelings of fraternal love  
Upon the unassuming things that hold  
A silent station in this beauteous world.

## THE PRELUDE

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found  
Once more in Man an object of delight,  
Of pure imagination, and of love;  
And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,  
Again I took the intellectual eye  
For my instructor, studious more to see  
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.  
Knowledge was given accordingly; my trust  
Became more firm in feelings that had stood  
The test of such a trial; clearer far  
My sense of excellence — of right and wrong:  
The promise of the present time retired  
Into its true proportion; sanguine schemes,  
Ambitious projects, pleased me less; I sought  
For present good in life's familiar face,  
And built thereon my hopes of good to come.

With settling judgments now of what would last  
And what would disappear; prepared to find  
Presumption, folly, madness, in the men  
Who thrust themselves upon the passive world  
As Rulers of the world; to see in these,  
Even when the public welfare is their aim,  
Plans without thought, or built on theories  
Vague and unsound; and having brought the books  
Of modern statist to their proper test,



## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Life, human life, with all its sacred claims  
Of sex and age, and heaven-descended rights,  
Mortal, or those beyond the reach of death;  
And having thus discerned how dire a thing  
Is worshipped in that idol proudly named  
“The Wealth of Nations,” *where* alone that wealth  
Is lodged, and how increased; and having gained  
A more judicious knowledge of the worth  
And dignity of individual man,  
No composition of the brain, but man  
Of whom we read, the man whom we behold  
With our own eyes — I could not but enquire —  
Not with less interest than heretofore,  
But greater, though in spirit more subdued —  
Why is this glorious creature to be found  
One only in ten thousand? What one is,  
Why may not millions be? What bars are thrown  
By Nature in the way of such a hope?  
Our animal appetites and daily wants,  
Are these obstructions insurmountable?  
If not, then others vanish into air.  
“Inspect the basis of the social pile:  
Enquire,” said I, “how much of mental power  
And genuine virtue they possess who live  
By bodily toil, labour exceeding far  
Their due proportion, under all the weight

## THE PRELUDE

Of that injustice which upon ourselves  
Ourselves entail." Such estimate to frame  
I chiefly looked (what need to look beyond?)  
Among the natural abodes of men,  
Fields with their rural works; recalled to mind  
My earliest notices; with these compared  
The observations made in later youth,  
And to that day continued. — For, the time  
Had never been when throes of mighty Nations  
And the world's tumult unto me could yield,  
How far soe'er transported and possessed,  
Full measure of content; but still I craved  
An intermingling of distinct regards  
And truths of individual sympathy  
Nearer ourselves. Such often might be gleaned  
From the great City, else it must have proved  
To me a heart-depressing wilderness;  
But much was wanting: therefore did I turn  
To you, ye pathways, and ye lonely roads;  
Sought you enriched with everything I prized,  
With human kindnesses and simple joys.

Oh! next to one dear state of bliss, vouchsafed,  
Alas! to few in this untoward world,  
The bliss of walking daily in life's prime  
Through field or forest with the maid we love,

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

While yet our hearts are young, while yet we breathe  
Nothing but happiness, in some lone nook,  
Deep vale, or anywhere, the home of both,  
From which it would be misery to stir:  
Oh! next to such enjoyment of our youth,  
In my esteem, next to such dear delight,  
Was that of wandering on from day to day  
Where I could meditate in peace, and cull  
Knowledge that step by step might lead me on  
To wisdom; or, as lightsome as a bird  
Wafted upon the wind from distant lands,  
Sing notes of greeting to strange fields or groves,  
Which lacked not voice to welcome me in turn;  
And, when that pleasant toil had ceased to please,  
Converse with men, where if we meet a face  
We almost meet a friend, on naked heaths  
With long long ways before, by cottage bench,  
Or well-spring where the weary traveller rests.

Who doth not love to follow with his eye  
The windings of a public way? the sight,  
Familiar object as it is, hath wrought  
On my imagination since the morn  
Of childhood, when a disappearing line,  
One daily present to my eyes, that crossed  
The naked summit of a far-off hill

## THE PRELUDE

Beyond the limits that my feet had trod,  
Was like an invitation into space  
Boundless, or guide into eternity.  
Yes, something of the grandeur which invests  
The mariner, who sails the roaring sea  
Through storm and darkness, early in my mind  
Surrounded, too, the wanderers of the earth;  
Grandeur as much, and loveliness far more.  
Awed have I been by strolling Bedlamites;  
From many other uncouth vagrants (passed  
In fear) have walked with quicker step; but why  
Take note of this? When I began to enquire,  
To watch and question those I met, and speak  
Without reserve to them, the lonely roads  
Were open schools in which I daily read  
With most delight the passions of mankind,  
Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed;  
There saw into the depth of human souls,  
Souls that appear to have no depth at all  
To careless eyes. And — now convinced at heart  
How little those formalities, to which  
With overweening trust alone we give  
The name of Education, have to do  
With real feeling and just sense; how vain  
A correspondence with the talking world  
Proves to the most; and called to make good search

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

If man's estate, by doom of Nature yoked  
With toil, be therefore yoked with ignorance;  
If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,  
And intellectual strength so rare a boon —  
I prized such walks still more, for there I found  
Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace  
And steadiness, and healing and repose  
To every angry passion. There I heard,  
From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths  
Replete with honour; sounds in unison  
With loftiest promises of good and fair.

There are who think that strong affection, love  
Known by whatever name, is falsely deemed  
A gift, to use a term which they would use,  
Of vulgar nature; that its growth requires  
Retirement, leisure, language purified  
By manners studied and elaborate;  
That whoso feels such passion in its strength  
Must live within the very light and air  
Of courteous usages refined by art.  
True is it, where oppression worse than death  
Salutes the being at his birth, where grace  
Of culture hath been utterly unknown,  
And poverty and labour in excess  
From day to day pre-occupy the ground

## THE PRELUDE

Of the affections, and to Nature's self  
Oppose a deeper nature; there, indeed,  
Love cannot be; nor does it thrive with ease  
Among the close and overcrowded haunts  
Of cities, where the human heart is sick,  
And the eye feeds it not, and cannot feed.  
— Yes, in those wanderings deeply did I feel  
How we mislead each other; above all,  
How books mislead us, seeking their reward  
From judgments of the wealthy Few, who see  
By artificial lights; how they debase  
The Many for the pleasure of those Few;  
Effeminately level down the truth  
To certain general notions, for the sake  
Of being understood at once, or else  
Through want of better knowledge in the heads  
That framed them; flattering self-conceit with words,  
That, while they most ambitiously set forth  
Extrinsic differences, the outward marks  
Whereby society has parted man  
From man, neglect the universal heart.

Here, calling up to mind what then I saw,  
A youthful traveller, and see daily now  
In the familiar circuit of my home,  
Here might I pause, and bend in reverence



## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

To Nature, and the power of human minds,  
To men as they are men within themselves.  
How oft high service is performed within,  
When all the external man is rude in show, —  
Not like a temple rich with pomp and gold,  
But a mere mountain chapel, that protects  
Its simple worshippers from sun and shower.  
Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these,  
If future years mature me for the task,  
Will I record the praises, making verse  
Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth  
And sanctity of passion, speak of these,  
That justice may be done, obeisance paid  
Where it is due: thus haply shall I teach,  
Inspire; through unadulterated ears  
Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope, — my theme  
No other than the very heart of man,  
As found among the best of those who live —  
Not unexalted by religious faith,  
Nor uninformed by books, good books, though few —  
In Nature's presence: thence may I select  
Sorrow, that is not sorrow, but delight;  
And miserable love, that is not pain  
To hear of, for the glory that redounds  
Therefrom to human kind, and what we are.  
Be mine to follow with no timid step

## THE PRELUDE

Where knowledge leads me: it shall be my pride  
That I have dared to tread this holy ground,  
Speaking no dream, but things oracular;  
Matter not lightly to be heard by those  
Who to the letter of the outward promise  
Do read the invisible soul; by men adroit  
In speech, and for communion with the world  
Accomplished; minds whose faculties are then  
Most active when they are most eloquent,  
And elevated most when most admired.  
Men may be found of other mould than these,  
Who are their own upholders, to themselves  
Encouragement, and energy, and will,  
Expressing liveliest thoughts in lively words  
As native passion dictates. Others, too,  
There are among the walks of homely life  
Still higher, men for contemplation framed,  
Shy, and unpractised in the strife of phrase;  
Meek men, whose very souls perhaps would sink  
Beneath them, summoned to such intercourse:  
Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,  
The thought, the image, and the silent joy:  
Words are but under-agents in their souls;  
When they are grasping with their greatest strength,  
They do not breathe among them: this I speak  
In gratitude to God, Who feeds our hearts

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

For His own service; knoweth, loveth us,  
When we are unregarded by the world.

Also, about this time did I receive  
Convictions still more strong than heretofore,  
Not only that the inner frame is good,  
And graciously composed, but that, no less,  
Nature for all conditions wants not power  
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,  
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe  
Grandeur upon the very humblest face  
Of human life. I felt that the array  
Of act and circumstance, and visible form,  
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind  
What passion makes them; that meanwhile the forms  
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,  
That intermingles with those works of man  
To which she summons him; although the works  
Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own;  
And that the Genius of the Poet hence  
May boldly take his way among mankind  
Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood  
By Nature's side among the men of old,  
And so shall stand for ever. Dearest Friend!  
If thou partake the animating faith  
That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each

## THE PRELUDE

Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,  
Have each his own peculiar faculty,  
Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive  
Objects unseen before, thou wilt not blame  
The humblest of this band who dares to hope  
That unto him hath also been vouchsafed  
An insight that in some sort he possesses,  
A privilege whereby a work of his,  
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,  
Creative and enduring, may become  
A power like one of Nature's. To a hope  
Not less ambitious once among the wilds  
Of Sarum's Plain, my youthful spirit was raised;  
There, as I ranged at will the pastoral downs  
Trackless and smooth, or paced the bare white roads  
Lengthening in solitude their dreary line,  
Time with his retinue of ages fled  
Backwards, nor checked his flight until I saw  
Our dim ancestral Past in vision clear;  
Saw multitudes of men, and, here and there,  
A single Briton clothed in wolf-skin vest,  
With shield and stone-axe, stride across the wold;  
The voice of spears was heard, the rattling spear  
Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in strength,  
Long mouldered, of barbaric majesty.  
I called on Darkness — but before the word

## IMAGINATION AND TASTE

Was uttered, midnight darkness seemed to take  
All objects from my sight; and lo! again  
The Desert visible by dismal flames;  
It is the sacrificial altar, fed  
With living men — how deep the groans! the voice  
Of those that crowd the giant wicker thrills  
The monumental hillocks, and the pomp  
Is for both worlds, the living and the dead.  
At other moments — (for through that wide waste  
Three summer days I roamed) where'er the Plain  
Was figured o'er with circles, lines, or mounds,  
That yet survive, a work, as some divine,  
Shaped by the Druids, so to represent  
Their knowledge of the heavens, and image forth  
The constellations — gently was I charmed  
Into a waking dream, a reverie  
That, with believing eyes, where'er I turned,  
Beheld long-bearded teachers, with white wands  
Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky,  
Alternately, and plain below, while breath  
Of music swayed their motions, and the waste  
Rejoiced with them and me in those sweet sounds.

This for the past, and things that may be viewed  
Or fancied in the obscurity of years  
From monumental hints: and thou, O Friend!

## THE PRELUDE

Pleased with some unpremeditated strains  
That served those wanderings to beguile, hast said  
That then and there my mind had exercised  
Upon the vulgar forms of present things,  
The actual world of our familiar days,  
Yet higher power; had caught from them a tone,  
An image, and a character, by books  
Not hitherto reflected. Call we this  
A partial judgment — and yet why? for *then*  
We were as strangers; and I may not speak  
Thus wrongfully of verse, however rude,  
Which on thy young imagination, trained  
In the great City, broke like light from far.  
Moreover, each man's Mind is to herself  
Witness and judge; and I remember well  
That in life's every-day appearances  
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight  
Of a new world — a world, too, that was fit  
To be transmitted, and to other eyes  
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws  
Whence spiritual dignity originates,  
Which do both give it being and maintain  
A balance, an ennobling interchange  
Of action from without and from within;  
The excellence, pure function, and best power  
Both of the objects seen, and eye that sees.



## CONCLUSION

### BOOK FOURTEENTH

#### CONCLUSION

IN one of those excursions (may they ne'er  
Fade from remembrance!) through the Northern tracts  
Of Cambria ranging with a youthful friend,  
I left Bethgelert's huts at couching-time,  
And westward took my way, to see the sun  
Rise, from the top of Snowdon. To the door  
Of a rude cottage at the mountain's base  
We came, and roused the shepherd who attends  
The adventurous stranger's steps, a trusty guide;  
Then, cheered by short refreshment, sallied forth.

It was a close, warm, breezeless summer night,  
Wan, dull, and glaring, with a dripping fog  
Low-hung and thick that covered all the sky;  
But, undiscouraged, we began to climb  
The mountain-side. The mist soon girt us round,  
And, after ordinary travellers' talk  
With our conductor, pensively we sank  
Each into commerce with his private thoughts:  
Thus did we breast the ascent, and by myself  
Was nothing either seen or heard that checked  
Those musings or diverted, save that once  
The shepherd's lurcher, who, among the crags,

## THE PRELUDE

Had to his joy unearthed a hedgehog, teased  
His coiled-up prey with barkings turbulent.  
This small adventure, for even such it seemed  
In that wild place and at the dead of night,  
Being over and forgotten, on we wound  
In silence as before. With forehead bent  
Earthward, as if in opposition set  
Against an enemy, I panted up  
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts.  
Thus might we wear a midnight hour away,  
Ascending at loose distance each from each,  
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band;  
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,  
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;  
Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,  
For instantly a light upon the turf  
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up  
The Moon hung naked in a firmament  
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet  
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.  
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved  
All over this still ocean; and beyond,  
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,  
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,  
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared  
To dwindle, and give up his majesty,

## CONCLUSION

Usurped upon far as the sight could reach.  
Not so the ethereal vault; encroachment none  
Was there, nor loss; only the inferior stars  
Had disappeared, or shed a fainter light  
In the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon,  
Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed  
Upon the billowy ocean, as it lay  
All meek and silent, save that through a rift —  
Not distant from the shore whereon we stood,  
A fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place —  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!  
Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,  
For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens.

When into air had partially dissolved  
That vision, given to spirits of the night  
And three chance human wanderers, in calm thought  
Reflected, it appeared to me the type  
Of a majestic intellect, its acts  
And its possessions, what it has and craves,  
What in itself it is, and would become.  
There I beheld the emblem of a mind  
That feeds upon infinity, that broods  
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear  
Its voices issuing forth to silent night

## THE PRELUDE

In one continuous stream; a mind sustained  
By recognitions of transcendent power,  
In sense conducting to ideal form,  
In soul of more than mortal privilege.  
One function, above all, of such a mind  
Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,  
'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,  
That mutual domination which she loves  
To exert upon the face of outward things,  
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed  
With interchangeable supremacy,  
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,  
And cannot choose but feel. The power, which all  
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus  
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express  
Resemblance of that glorious faculty  
That higher minds bear with them as their own.  
This is the very spirit in which they deal  
With the whole compass of the universe:  
They from their native selves can send abroad  
Kindred mutations; for themselves create  
A like existence; and, whene'er it dawns  
Created for them, catch it, or are caught  
By its inevitable mastery,  
Like angels stopped upon the wing by sound  
Of harmony from Heaven's remotest spheres.

## CONCLUSION

Them the enduring and the transient both  
Serve to exalt; they build up greatest things  
From least suggestions; ever on the watch,  
Willing to work and to be wrought upon,  
They need not extraordinary calls  
To rouse them; in a world of life they live,  
By sensible impressions not enthralled,  
But by their quickening impulse made more prompt  
To hold fit converse with the spiritual world,  
And with the generations of mankind  
Spread over time, past, present, and to come,  
Age after age, till Time shall be no more.  
Such minds are truly from the Deity,  
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss  
That flesh can know is theirs — the consciousness  
Of Whom they are, habitually infused  
Through every image and through every thought,  
And all affections by communion raised  
From earth to heaven, from human to divine;  
Hence endless occupation for the Soul,  
Whether discursive or intuitive;  
Hence cheerfulness for acts of daily life,  
Emotions which best foresight need not fear,  
Most worthy then of trust when most intense.  
Hence, amid ills that vex and wrongs that crush  
Our hearts — if here the words of Holy Writ

## THE PRELUDE

May with fit reverence be applied — that peace  
Which passeth understanding, that repose  
In moral judgments which from this pure source  
Must come, or will by man be sought in vain.

Oh! who is he that hath his whole life long  
Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in himself?  
For this alone is genuine liberty:  
Where is the favoured being who hath held  
That course unchecked, unerring, and untired,  
In one perpetual progress smooth and bright? —  
A humbler destiny have we retraced,  
And told of lapse and hesitating choice,  
And backward wanderings along thorny ways:  
Yet — compassed round by mountain solitudes,  
Within whose solemn temple I received  
My earliest visitations, careless then  
Of what was given me; and which now I range,  
A meditative, oft a suffering, man —  
Do I declare — in accents which, from truth  
Deriving cheerful confidence, shall blend  
Their modulation with these vocal streams —  
That, whatsoever falls my better mind,  
Revolving with the accidents of life,  
May have sustained, that, howsoe'er misled,  
Never did I, in quest of right and wrong,



## CONCLUSION

Tamper with conscience from a private aim;  
Nor was in any public hope the dupe  
Of selfish passions; nor did ever yield  
Wilfully to mean cares or low pursuits,  
But shrunk with apprehensive jealousy  
From every combination which might aid  
The tendency, too potent in itself,  
Of use and custom to bow down the soul  
Under a growing weight of vulgar sense,  
And substitute a universe of death  
For that which moves with light and life informed,  
Actual, divine, and true. To fear and love,  
To love as prime and chief, for there fear ends,  
Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,  
In presence of sublime or beautiful forms,  
With the adverse principles of pain and joy —  
Evil as one is rashly named by men  
Who know not what they speak. By love subsists  
All lasting grandeur, by pervading love;  
That gone, we are as dust. — Behold the fields  
In balmy spring-time full of rising flowers  
And joyous creatures; see that pair, the lamb  
And the lamb's mother, and their tender ways  
Shall touch thee to the heart; thou callest this love,  
And not inaptly so, for love it is,  
Far as it carries thee. In some green bower

## THE PRELUDE

Rest, and be not alone, but have thou there  
The One who is thy choice of all the world:  
There linger, listening, gazing, with delight  
Impassioned, but delight how pitiable!  
Unless this love by a still higher love  
Be hallowed, love that breathes not without awe;  
Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,  
By heaven inspired; that frees from chains the soul,  
Lifted, in union with the purest, best,  
Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise  
Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's Throne.

This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist  
Without Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.  
This faculty hath been the feeding source  
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream  
From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard  
Its natal murmur; followed it to light  
And open day; accompanied its course  
Among the ways of Nature, for a time  
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed;  
Then given it greeting as it rose once more  
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast

## CONCLUSION

The works of man and face of human life;  
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn  
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought  
Of human Being, Eternity, and God.

Imagination having been our theme,  
So also hath that intellectual Love,  
For they are each in each, and cannot stand  
Dividually. — Here must thou be, O Man!  
Power to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;  
Here keepest thou in singleness thy state:  
No other can divide with thee this work:  
No secondary hand can intervene  
To fashion this ability; 't is thine,  
The prime and vital principle is thine  
In the recesses of thy nature, far  
From any reach of outward fellowship,  
Else is not thine at all. But joy to him,  
Oh, joy to him who here hath sown, hath laid  
Here, the foundation of his future years!  
For all that friendship, all that love can do,  
All that a darling countenance can look  
Or dear voice utter, to complete the man,  
Perfect him, made imperfect in himself,  
All shall be his: and he whose soul hath risen  
Up to the height of feeling intellect

## THE PRELUDE

Shall want no humbler tenderness; his heart  
Be tender as a nursing mother's heart;  
Of female softness shall his life be full,  
Of humble cares and delicate desires,  
Mild interests and gentlest sympathies.

Child of my parents! Sister of my soul!  
Thanks in sincerest verse have been elsewhere  
Poured out for all the early tenderness  
Which I from thee imbibed: and 't is most true  
That later seasons owed to thee no less;  
For, spite of thy sweet influence and the touch  
Of kindred hands that opened out the springs  
Of genial thought in childhood, and in spite  
Of all that unassisted I had marked  
In life or nature of those charms minute,  
That win their way into the heart by stealth  
(Still to the very going-out of youth)  
I too exclusively esteemed *that* love,  
And sought *that* beauty, which, as Milton sings,  
Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down  
This over-sternness; but for thee, dear Friend!  
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had stood  
In her original self too confident,  
Retained too long a countenance severe;  
A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds

*Dorothy Wordsworth*









## CONCLUSION

Familiar, and a favourite of the stars:  
But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,  
Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,  
And teach the little birds to build their nests  
And warble in its chambers. At a time  
When Nature, destined to remain so long  
Foremost in my affections, had fallen back  
Into a second place, pleased to become  
A handmaid to a nobler than herself,  
When every day brought with it some new sense  
Of exquisite regard for common things,  
And all the earth was budding with these gifts  
Of more refined humanity, thy breath,  
Dear Sister! was a kind of gentler spring  
That went before my steps. Thereafter came  
One whom with thee friendship had early paired;  
She came, no more a phantom to adorn  
A moment, but an inmate of the heart,  
And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined  
To penetrate the lofty and the low;  
Even as one essence of pervading light  
Shines, in the brightest of ten thousand stars  
And the meek worm that feeds her lonely lamp  
Couched in the dewy grass.

With such a theme,  
Coleridge! with this my argument, of thee

## THE PRELUDE

Shall I be silent? O capacious Soul!  
Placed on this earth to love and understand,  
And from thy presence shed the light of love,  
Shall I be mute, ere thou be spoken of?  
Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts  
Did also find its way. Thus fear relaxed  
Her overweening grasp; thus thoughts and things  
In the self-haunting spirit learned to take  
More rational proportions; mystery,  
The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,  
Of life and death, time and eternity,  
Admitted more habitually a mild  
Interposition — a serene delight  
In closelier gathering cares, such as become  
A human creature, howsoe'er endowed,  
Poet, or destined for a humbler name;  
And so the deep enthusiastic joy,  
The rapture of the hallelujah sent  
From all that breathes and is, was chastened,  
                  stemmed,  
And balanced by pathetic truth, by trust  
In hopeful reason, leaning on the stay  
Of Providence; and in reverence for duty,  
Here, if need be, struggling with storms, and there  
Strewing in peace life's humblest ground with herbs,  
At every season green, sweet at all hours.

## CONCLUSION

And now, O Friend! this history is brought  
To its appointed close: the discipline  
And consummation of a Poet's mind,  
In everything that stood most prominent,  
Have faithfully been pictured; we have reached  
The time (our guiding object from the first)  
When we may, not presumptuously, I hope,  
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such  
My knowledge, as to make me capable  
Of building up a Work that shall endure.  
Yet much hath been omitted, as need was;  
Of books how much! and even of the other wealth  
That is collected among woods and fields,  
Far more: for Nature's secondary grace  
Hath hitherto been barely touched upon,  
The charm more superficial that attends  
Her works, as they present to Fancy's choice  
Apt illustrations of the moral world,  
Caught at a glance, or traced with curious pains.

Finally, and above all, O Friend! (I speak  
With due regret) how much is overlooked  
In human nature and her subtle ways,  
As studied first in our own hearts, and then  
In life among the passions of mankind,  
Varying their composition and their hue,

## THE PRELUDE

Where'er we move, under the diverse shapes  
That individual character presents  
To an attentive eye. For progress meet,  
Along this intricate and difficult path,  
Whate'er was wanting, something had I gained,  
As one of many schoolfellows compelled,  
In hardy independence, to stand up  
Amid conflicting interests, and the shock  
Of various tempers; to endure and note  
What was not understood, though known to be;  
Among the mysteries of love and hate,  
Honour and shame, looking to right and left,  
Unchecked by innocence too delicate,  
And moral notions too intolerant,  
Sympathies too contracted. Hence, when called  
To take a station among men, the step  
Was easier, the transition more secure,  
More profitable also; for, the mind  
Learns from such timely exercise to keep  
In wholesome separation the two natures,  
The one that feels, the other that observes.

Yet one word more of personal concern; —  
Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,  
I led an undomestic wanderer's life  
In London chiefly harboured, whence I roamed,



## CONCLUSION

Tarrying at will in many a pleasant spot  
Of rural England's cultivated vales  
Or Cambrian solitudes. A youth — (he bore  
The name of Calvert — it shall live, if words  
Of mine can give it life,) in firm belief  
That by endowments not from me withheld  
Good might be furthered — in his last decay  
By a bequest sufficient for my needs  
Enabled me to pause for choice, and walk  
At large and unrestrained; nor damped too soon  
By mortal cares. Himself no Poet, yet  
Far less a common follower of the world,  
He deemed that my pursuits and labours lay  
Apart from all that leads to wealth, or even  
A necessary maintenance insures,  
Without some hazard to the finer sense;  
He cleared a passage for me, and the stream  
Flowed in the bent of Nature.

Having now  
Told what best merits mention, further pains  
Our present purpose seems not to require,  
And I have other tasks. Recall to mind  
The mood in which this labour was begun,  
O Friend! The termination of my course  
Is nearer now, much nearer; yet even then,  
In that distraction and intense desire,

## THE PRELUDE

I said unto the life which I had lived,  
Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee  
Which 't is reproach to hear? Anon I rose  
As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched  
Vast prospect of the world which I had been  
And was; and hence this Song, which, like a lark,  
I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens  
Singing, and often with more plaintive voice  
To earth attempered and her deep-drawn sighs,  
Yet centring all in love, and in the end  
All gratulant, if rightly understood.

Whether to me shall be allotted life,  
And, with life, power to accomplish aught of  
worth,  
That will be deemed no insufficient plea  
For having given the story of myself,  
Is all uncertain: but, beloved Friend!  
When, looking back, thou seest, in clearer view  
Than any liveliest sight of yesterday,  
That summer, under whose indulgent skies,  
Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved  
Unchecked, or loitered 'mid her sylvan combs,  
Thou in bewitching words, with happy heart,  
Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient Man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes

## CONCLUSION

Didst utter of the Lady Christabel;  
And I, associate with such labour, steeped  
In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,  
Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found,  
After the perils of his moonlight ride,  
Near the loud waterfall; or her who sate  
In misery near the miserable Thorn —  
When thou dost to that summer turn thy thoughts,  
And hast before thee all which then we were,  
To thee, in memory of that happiness,  
It will be known, by thee at least, my Friend!  
Felt, that the history of a Poet's mind  
Is labour not unworthy of regard;  
To thee the work shall justify itself.

The last and later portions of this gift  
Have been prepared, not with the buoyant spirits  
That were our daily portion when we first  
Together wantoned in wild Poesy,  
But, under pressure of a private grief,  
Keen and enduring, which the mind and heart,  
That in this meditative history  
Have been laid open, needs must make me feel  
More deeply, yet enable me to bear  
More firmly; and a comfort now hath risen  
From hope that thou art near, and wilt be soon

## THE PRELUDE

Restored to us in renovated health;  
When, after the first mingling of our tears,  
'Mong other consolations, we may draw  
Some pleasure from this offering of my love.

Oh! yet a few short years of useful life,  
And all will be complete, thy race be run,  
Thy monument of glory will be raised;  
Then, though (too weak to tread the ways of truth)  
This age fall back to old idolatry,  
Though men return to servitude as fast  
As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame,  
By nations, sink together, we shall still  
Find solace — knowing what we have learnt to  
know,

Rich in true happiness if allowed to be  
Faithful alike in forwarding a day  
Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work  
(Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)  
Of their deliverance, surely yet to come.  
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, sanctified  
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,  
Others will love, and we will teach them how;  
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes  
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth

## CONCLUSION

On which he dwells, above this frame of things  
(Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes  
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)  
In beauty exalted, as it is itself  
Of quality and fabric more divine.

END OF VOLUME III

**The Riverside Press**  
**CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS**  
**U . S . A**



































